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TWELVE LECTURES

UPON THE

HISTORY OF ST. PAUL,

DELIVERED

DURING LENT, 1831, AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY, UPPER CHELSEA.

PART I.

BY THE LATE

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PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

In continuing the series of Scriptural Histories, which the author has now for some years past made the subject of his weekly ministrations during the season of Lent, he finds the difficulties increase upon him. There are, in the life of every man of God, recorded in Holy Writ, so many situations, temptations, and trials, of which he partakes in common with his brethren, that in minutely dwelling upon each as it occurs, the author feels

there is an impossibility, at least with his contracted powers, of avoiding repetitions which may become wearisome to his readers. Notwithstanding this disadvantage, there is still so much of interest, and so much of instruction, in all that was done, and said, and written, by these great exemplars of our faith, that it is impossible not to take delight in following up the inquiry, so far as the light of God's word shall guide us, into the most minute transactions of their lives, and the most secret workings of their souls.

After the favourable manner in which the other similar productions of the author have been received, it may be supposed that he feels less hesitation in committing the present volume to the press; the contrary is, however, the

fact: every successive attempt of this kind only convincing him how much more is needed than he is able to supply, to render these specimens of scriptural biography the invaluable vehicles of Divine truth, which, in other and abler hands, they might unquestionably become.

That it may please the great Lord of the harvest to shed upon the seed sown the life-giving dews of His quickening Spirit, that in His good time it may bring forth fruit, and minister spiritual food and sustenance to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, among the souls committed to his charge, is the earnest prayer with which the author accompanies this little work. And if he may look to a still wider circulation of it, he would pray that all, into whose

hands it shall fall, may derive from these pages a clearer insight into that faith which alone can justify, and a greater desire after that holiness, at once its evidence and its fruit, so beautifully illustrated in the life and conduct of St. Paul.

Upper Chelsea,
March, 1838.

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LECTURES.

LECTURE I.

ACTS IX. 4.

"AND HE FELL TO THE EARTH, AND HEARD A VOICE SAYING UNTO HIM, SAUL, SAUL, WHY PERSECUTEST THOU ME?"

IN these weekly lectures it has always been my desire to consider particularly the younger members of our congregation; and I have therefore been led to select such subjects as may be the most likely to interest, while under God's blessing, they may also tend to instruct and edify more especially that portion of my hearers. I trust that this will be my

apology for the absence of all elaborate criticism, all deep reasoning upon abstract truths, and for the exclusion of many of those higher views of spiritual things, which might be more agreeable and even more profitable to some among you, and that you will bear in mind, not merely this morning, but throughout the course, that most valuable apostolical injunction, "You, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please yourselves."

The subject which I have selected for our consideration, during the present Lent, is the history of that great apostle of the Gentiles, the most abundant in his labours, the most voluminous in his writings, the most successful in his ministrations, St. Paul. We behold in him so remarkable an instance of the power of divine grace, over all the opposing elements of an impetuous natural disposition, and over all the prejudices of education, that we cannot but hope there will

be few who may not, under the divine blessing, profit by the consideration of some of the leading incidents in his eventful history.

We possess more information upon the early history of St. Paul, than of any other apostle, for we learn from his own lips that he was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia,[1] and that his parents were Jews,[2] but enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizens, which had been conferred by the Cæsars upon that city.[3] He had himself been brought up to the business of a tent-maker, according to the admirable practice of the Jews, who, in whatever rank of life they moved, invariably instructed their children in some useful occupation. So universal was this custom, that it is upon record that many of their most illustrious Rabbies, whose writings

[1] Acts ix. 11 ; xxi. 39 ; xxii. 3.

[2] Acts xxiii. 6 ; xxvi. 5.

[3] Lardner, "Credibility of Gospel History," p. 1. b. i. c. 10. sec. 7.

have descended to posterity, themselves followed the most common secular employments. We have, accordingly, an instance of a great and eminent critic, who was a carpenter, another an iron-founder, with many similar examples. It was, indeed, a well-known proverb among the Jews, "If a man does not teach his son a trade, he teaches him to steal."

In addition to the employment to which we have referred, St. Paul had been well instructed in secular learning, as is evident from his allusions to the manners and customs of Greece and Rome, and his citation of heathen poets, as well as from the use of Platonic phrases in his Epistles. This, however, was not all; an elaborate religious education had been superadded to those instructions, and at the feet of Gamaliel, the great Jewish teacher of those days, St. Paul had become a Pharisee and a zealot.

It would be difficult to picture to ourselves a process less likely, according to

human apprehension, than that to which St. Paul was subjected, to have prepared the way for a meek, and humble, and self-denying reception of the doctrines of the cross. Pride of birth, pride of intellect, pride of knowledge, and though last, the deadliest and the worst of all these serpents, which are nurtured in the human heart, pride of religious profession, miscalled religious pride, all raised their hydra heads against the entrance of the Lamb of God into his soul.

Of St. Paul (or as he was at that time called, Saul,) we hear but little in his unconverted state, yet that little is enough to appal the mind at the thought of the deeply-rooted corruption and hostility to God of the natural heart, under the most favourable habits, and the most refined education.

The first mention made of him in holy writ is as follows. When the blessed proto-martyr, Stephen, had borne his solemn testimony to the guilt of his judges

before the assembled Sanhedrim; and, in pursuance of their iniquitous sentence, was carried forth to be put to death for the name of Jesus, "the witnesses," who by the Jewish law were obliged to cast the first stone, having disrobed themselves for the more active discharge of their horrible office, "laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."

How astonishing an introduction is this to the history of one of the most devoted of the saints of God! Picture for a moment to your imagination this first scene in the life of Saul, with which the pen of inspiration has presented us: it will assist you in forming a less inadequate idea of the power of divine grace, when you thus learn to appreciate the tremendous obstacles over which it shortly after so instantaneously and completely triumphed.

Behold the meek and lowly-minded Stephen, his countenance still glowing with that angelic lustre which had for a

time awed even his bitterest persecutors into mute attention; his soul filled with the glorious vision which he had thus described before the astonished Sanhedrim, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God:" his heart supported by the felt presence of Him, whom his bodily eyes had in that beatific vision gazed upon: his frame sinking beneath the murderous efforts of his executioners, who were casting stone after stone upon that poor, broken, agonized body, and yet the blessed martyr bearing all calmly, contentedly, peacefully, and praying for his murderers, "committing himself to Him who judgeth righteously," and sweetly falling "asleep in Jesus." Now, observe for a moment the chief spectator of this dreadful scene: "a young man," compelled by no necessity to be present, but delighting to gratify his animosity against the followers of the Crucified, and rejoicing in the thought that he himself should soon become, in-

stead of a mere spectator of such atrocities, an actor and a leader.

Can it be true, can it be possible, that conduct so guilty, so abhorrent to every better feeling, even of the natural heart, should form the opening scene in the life of him, of whose lofty attainments in spiritual things, of whose holy and consistent conduct, of whose glorious testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, we shall hereafter have to speak? It is most possible, most true. Then, blessed be God, who shall despair? who has sinned past forgiveness? whose heart is too hard to be broken by the power of divine grace, to be melted by the love of Christ, if this be indeed the first incident which the Spirit of God has bequeathed to us in the life of St. Paul? Am I now addressing any who have ever said, 'There is mercy with God, but it is not for me: there is compassion with Christ, but it cannot reach my case: there is a powerful influence in the Spirit, but it will never

touch my heart?' Then, my brethren, look carefully at this picture, and draw from it,—no licence for sin—but great and soul-encouraging views of the boundless infinity of divine love. There is mercy for the worst of sinners, for there was mercy for Saul: you cannot fear condemnation, where Saul obtained a free and full forgiveness. That God who was "found of him who sought him not,"[1] will surely not deny himself to you, who earnestly seek Him, through the blood of his dear Son.

The guilt of Saul, great and heinous as it was, in the incident to which we have referred, was not confined to his participation in that one dreadful deed: "As for Saul," continues the inspired historian, "he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison." Not content with the objects of his fury, which were to be met with in Jerusalem,

[1] Rom. x. 20.

he determined upon following those, whom the rage of persecution had scattered abroad, and for this purpose applied to "the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of *this way*," as he contemptuously called the religion of Jesus, "whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

Filled with the guilty feelings, which such an employment must have inspired, he set out upon his journey: many a mile was he permitted to travel peacefully and uninterruptedly, until at length he approached its close; as the inspired historian says, "He came near Damascus." How little do we know what an hour may bring forth! While Saul was rejoicing in all the pride of an unawakened heart, and looking forward to the towers of that city, which, as he hoped, was so soon to be the theatre of his cruel exertions, in which he might riot uncontrolled in all the rage of persecution, the great

Disposer of events had determined that there, in that very city, where Saul was expecting to eradicate the Gospel for ever, even there should he be found the boldest promulgator of its mysteries, the most undaunted preacher of its truths.

Who will deny the sovereign power of God over the hearts of men, with such a fact as this before their eyes? Or rather, how many are there in every congregation whose own hearts, and lives, bear abundant evidence to the same powerful influence, exerted perhaps in a less conspicuous, but not in a less decided and unequivocal manner? Are there none among you, my brethren, who remember the day when you also "verily thought you ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," but who have now no higher wish, no brighter joy, than to live and labour, and, if needs be, to die for that blessed Master, for that endeared and hallowed name? But let us hasten to the instructive particulars of

the conversion before us. "As he journeyed, suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Saul, humbled to the very dust, aware now of the full extent of his guilt, trembling at the recollection of his sin, and astonished at the unparalleled mercy, which had delivered him from its punishment, exclaimed, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" I am now thy prisoner, bound with the bands of love, thy servant in a bondage from which I trust never to be released, freely command my services, for all I have, and all I am, are thine, and thine for ever.

How wonderful an instance of the power of divine grace over the strongest impediments! how complete an attesta-

tion—if the conversion of St. Paul stood alone in the inspired records—to the truth of the Christian religion, and to the supernatural means by which it was established in the world! We can imagine the sceptic saying, when told of the manner in which the early Christians were in general brought, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to become the true and faithful followers of their Divine Master, 'I see nothing here which might not have been effected by natural means and secondary causes; the converts were men remarkable, if for any thing, for meekness, for cowardice, for weakness of intellect, for unformed and uncultivated minds; there appears, therefore, nothing surprising to me, that such men as these should readily have acquiesced in the humbling, self-denying, degrading doctrines of the cross; but show me a man, the reverse of all this, learned, bold, impatient of control, a clear and reasoning head, a well-stored and cultivated mind, with every oppor-

tunity for discovering the fallacies of the gospel, and every prejudice armed against it—bring me an instance of the conversion of such a man as this, to a creed which he had already learned to hate, and whose professors he had actually begun to persecute, and I will agree that something more than natural means must have been needed, to have made this man a Christian.'

It is scarcely necessary to add, that we triumphantly point to St. Paul! Here is a man, peculiarly unfitted by nature, by education, by prejudice, for the reception of the humbling truths of the gospel of Christ; and yet this man is brought, not by a long course of learned arguments, not by the strength of eloquence, but by the power and mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in a single moment, amongst the most humble, devoted, loving, self-distrusting of his followers. Could flesh and blood have revealed the doctrines of the cross, with transforming

power, to such a heart as this? Could human reasoning, or the mere force of moral persuasion, although reiterated for years, have produced the effect which we have now recorded? It is impossible. Do you seek, then, the means by which it was effected? Let the converted Saul himself reply: "By the grace of God, I am what I am." "God separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace."

Such is the manner, in which this illustrious convert himself speaks of that stupendous act of divine mercy; he ascribes it simply and entirely to the free, and sovereign grace of that God, who, when Saul was, as he describes himself, "a blasphemer and a persecutor," "the very chief of sinners," "had mercy on whom He would have mercy, and had compassion on whom He would have compassion." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out."

Having thus marked the divine nature of the change which was effected, and traced to its only real source, the sovereign love of God, let us observe,

First, The great practical lesson to be deduced from the conversion before us; and

Secondly, Its wonderful and instructive particulars.

I. The practical lesson to be deduced, from this, and every other case of conversion, whether apparently more or less miraculous, is a corroboration of that great scriptural truth, thus expressed by our Lord, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."—"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." This is the decree which has gone forth from the lips of eternal truth, not merely against

the blasphemer and the persecutor, but against every fallen child of a corrupt and fallen parent. It speaks to you, and to myself. All who shall enter into the eternal kingdom and joy of our Lord, either have been, or must be, the subjects of this heart-influencing change. The mind, which is by nature dark and ignorant of divine things; the conscience, which is not awakened by the spiritual requirements of the divine law; the will, which neither knows, nor desires to know, any thing of a conformity to God's will, must, like the mind, the conscience, and the will of Saul, be subjected to the enlightening, renewing, transforming power of God's divine Spirit.

We do not intend to say, that there are none, like Samuel, sanctified from their mother's womb; that there are none upon whom, by the grace of God, a change of nature, as well as a change of state, has taken place at the baptismal font; we know we are addressing ourselves to bap-

tized Christians, but so also were the prophets of old addressing themselves to circumcised Israelites, when they urged upon them the true circumcision of the heart and Spirit; and, therefore, we do not scruple to say to many among yourselves, "Ye must be born again;" a change must pass upon many of you, as astonishing, as supernatural, as entire, as that which passed on Saul.

This is not, indeed, to be effected in the present day, by means apparently so miraculous as those employed in the instance before us; but inasmuch as every conversion is above the power of man, is indeed the exclusive prerogative of God the Holy Ghost, every conversion is a divine and supernatural work, flowing completely and entirely from the sovereign grace of God our Saviour.

II. Let us proceed to investigate a little more accurately the wonderful and instructive particulars of the astonishing conversion before us, praying that by the

blessing of God, they may afford us some obvious and palpable tests, by which to examine the work of grace in our own souls, and determine its reality and truth.

The first step, then, in the miraculous transaction before us, was a radiance, far above the brightness of the sun, bursting forth from that eternal throne, where God the Father dwelleth in "the light, which no man may approach unto."

Under this symbol how clearly do we perceive the first step which the Almighty takes in the conversion of every human soul, which is brought out of the deadly darkness of sin, and the gloom of Satan's kingdom. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness," says the apostle to the Corinthians, "hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The light which shines in the renewed heart, is therefore traced by the apostle to the fountain from which it flows, viz. the unmerited love of God

the Father. It shines through the instrumentality of God the Holy Ghost, and leads directly to a true and believing sight of God the Saviour. Ask yourselves, then, my beloved brethren, for I would most earnestly desire to render this a subject of useful self-examination, are you conscious of any such event as this taking place in yourselves? Can you indeed say with him of old, in regard to yourself, "The darkness is past and the true light now shineth?" By the light of that supernatural radiance, I have been spiritually, as Saul was literally, enabled to see for myself the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, as my Saviour and my God. This was the first effect of that supernatural light acknowledged by St. Paul; he says expressly, I saw "that just one." This must be the first effect in your heart; you must "*see that just one*," and see him with the eye of faith, as your only hope of reconciliation with God, your only way to the Father,

your only guide to peace and to heaven, before you can become an adopted child of the Most High.

But further; the next effect of this miraculous manifestation upon Saul, was, that "he fell to the earth," overwhelmed with a consciousness of the greatness of the Saviour who appeared to him, and of his own guilt, and vileness, and nothingness. Mark here the second step in a true and scriptural conversion, a lowly, humbling, self-abasing view of your own heart, and life, and conversation; a view which throws all your thoughts of self-righteousness into the very dust, which lays you there yourself, with all your virtues, and all your amiable qualifications, as one utterly poor, and blind, and naked, waiting the will of your divine Master. My brethren, are there any feelings in your own hearts, answering to this effect of converting grace? Are you thus humble, thus lowly, thus conscious that you dare not so much as lift up your eyes

towards heaven, but must be content with the publican's humiliation, and the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner?" If you have ever possessed one saving view of the Lord Jesus Christ, this must have been, for this invariably is, the blessed effect of it. The lower we lie in self-renunciation, and self-abasement before God, the more certainly and the more highly will God exalt us in spiritual graces, and in eternal felicity.

But again; when Saul was thus humbled, he heard the voice, as he had before seen the face, of the ever-gracious Redeemer. "Saul, Saul!" were the first words which broke from the lips of the Saviour. When we address those to whom we speak, with the deepest feelings of pity and compassion, we love to dwell upon, to reiterate their name, but never when we address them in harshness, or in anger. So was it with our Lord in the days of His flesh: "Martha, Martha, thou art trou-

told about many things"—"Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, but I have prayed for thee"—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee!" So is it now in the kingdom of His glory; what a blessed proof that He is the unchanged and unchangeable Redeemer! Saul, Saul, though thou hast persecuted me, I love thee still. How completely, also, did this method of address realize the Almighty's declaration of old, "I have even called thee by name, though thou hast not known me;" and again, to Moses, "I know thee by name, and thou hast found grace in my sight." It is when the word of God speaks thus to our hearts individually, by the discriminating power of the Spirit of God, that the work of conversion is really effected. You may for years together be the members of a congregation to whom the saving truths of the Gospel are faithfully preached; but they may pass by you, until at length some awakening and

alarming threatening, some comforting, and soul-quickening promise goes directly with its blessed errand of light and love into the recesses of your hardened heart; until the message, from being general, becomes particular, and you are called by the effectual calling of God's grace, and the power of His love, from the world of the ungodly into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Our Lord continues, "Why persecutest thou me?" How tender, yet how forcible the expostulation! How entirely must this have sent home the conviction of sin, of this worst of sins, the sin of bigotry and persecution, to the heart of the humbled and terrified Saul! "Why persecutest thou ME?" I who have loved thee with an everlasting love, who have laid down my life for thy sake, who have interceded with my Father, that this worse than barren fig-tree should be let alone, until I should "draw him with the cords of a man, with the bonds of love."

Well might the astonished persecutor have replied, 'Lord, when saw I thee helpless and destitute, and persecuted thee? I did not in solemn mockery put upon thee that robe of kingly purple; I did not in cruel derision bind the crown of twisted thorns about thy brow; I did not nail thee to the cross; I did not taunt thee in thy dying agonies, or in thy last sad hour of burning thirst offer thee vinegar and gall: when persecuted I thee?' —"Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these," my beloved followers, "thou hast done it unto me."

O blessed union between the Lord and his redeemed people! Condescending declaration of a love which knows no bounds, infinite in extent, eternal in duration!

If you, my brethren, are united to Christ by a true and living faith, how unspeakably great, and blessed, and glorious are your privileges! He who touches you, it is God's own forcible

expression "touches the apple of His eye." "In all your affliction, He is afflicted;" every word unjustly spoken against you, is spoken against your Lord; every hand raised against you, is raised against your Master; every act of unkindness, every word of harshness, every false accusation, every "trial of cruel mocking," to which you are subjected, is placed to His account, and shall be returned an hundred fold, either here, or hereafter, into the bosom of His opponents. For this is the unalterable declaration of our Lord, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me." "He, therefore, that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God."

LECTURE II.

ACTS IX. 16.

"FOR I WILL SHOW HIM HOW GREAT THINGS HE MUST SUFFER FOR MY NAME'S SAKE."

WE concluded the former discourse before we had reached the close of the wondrous circumstances which attended the conversion of St. Paul.

The last point upon which we dwelt, was, as you will remember, that most affecting remonstrance of our Lord, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

We commence, therefore, the present discourse, with the answer of the terrified and convicted Saul to this voice from heaven: "And he said, Who art thou, Lord?" It is impossible not to be struck

with a reply so different from any thing we could have previously anticipated. Is this Saul, the blasphemer and the persecutor, who had made havoc of the Church, and defied the power and contemned the name of Jesus? Is this the proud, self-righteous Pharisee, who now, fallen to the earth, humbled in the very dust, seeks the knowledge of Him whom he had so long despised; and seeks it from the Saviour himself, with every evidence of respect and fear?—"Who art thou, LORD?" and then, immediately upon the reply on which we have already commented, asks, with every feeling of humility and contrition, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

How astonishing a change, how wonderful an evidence of the mighty power, possessed over the human heart by the almighty Saviour! How easily can that voice from heaven break the hardest heart, or soften the most obdurate feelings! Whether it speak in anger, or in mercy;

whether it come into the heart, as in the case of the apostate Emperor Julian, upon the arrow of his enemy, obliging him, after a life of deepest enmity to the doctrine and person of the Crucified, to cry aloud with dying breath, "O Galilean, thou hast conquered;" or as in the case before us, stopping the persecutor in mid career with the language of remonstrance and love; equally powerful, equally efficacious, is that heavenly voice.

They who have never heard it, know not in reality the Saviour from whom it comes; they who have received it in the love and in the power of it, have received that which flesh and blood could never have revealed to them, but their Father which is in heaven.

Let me, then, beseech you to inquire individually, my brethren, have you ever yet heard and obeyed this heavenly voice? It is not enough to be the mere outward worshipper of God, honouring him, and content to honour him with a merely

external obedience; but have you listened to the voice of the Redeemer, as He speaks to you by His word, by His providences, by His Spirit? Have you ever inquired, and not only of human teachers, but of Christ himself, "Who art thou, Lord?" Have you sought diligently, and prayerfully, under the guidance of His divine Spirit, an answer to that inquiry? and has the answer, as in the case before us, revealed Him to you as that Jesus, whom, if you have not persecuted, you have certainly too much neglected, too lightly esteemed? and has it induced you to cast yourselves in deep humility before His feet, and to say from the ground of the heart, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

My brethren, this it is, and nothing short of this, to be a Christian. This is, in fact, the essence of a true conversion, an entire resignation and complete conformity of our will to the will of God our Saviour. It is not to take up an empty

profession, not to bear a new name, but to become "a new creature;" to say, "Other lords beside Thee have had the dominion over me, but by Thee only will I (now) make mention of Thy name;" I will no longer consult my own sinful desires, my own vain and foolish wishes, my own corrupt heart; I will no longer take counsel of the world and its deluded followers; but I will upon every occasion,—upon the great and important transactions of my life, upon the trifling, and it may be unimportant avocations of every day,—make Thy will, Thy wishes, Thy word, O my divine Saviour, my rule and guide, my object and my end. Let this be, indeed, the language of your hearts, and you are not far from the kingdom of heaven. He who is thus invited to bear rule within your breasts, will accept the proffered sovereignty, and will come with heavenly peace, and joy, and healing on his wings.

Proceed we to consider the reply of our

Lord, to his deeply humbled, deeply penitent, and now converted persecutor: "The Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." How remarkable a change is manifested in this answer of our Divine Saviour! While Saul was hurrying forward to the completion of his dreadful purpose, to the ruin of his own soul, the Saviour calls to him in the accents of compassionate tenderness, as in haste to Abraham of old, to stay his hand; condescends even to expostulate with him, as a man remonstrates with a misguided friend who is hastening to his ruin; "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." As if a tender mother were to see her child running with headlong speed to the edge of a precipice, over which, if permitted to proceed, he must unquestionably fall, her first impulse would be, however she might afterwards chide or even punish him—the first fond feeling of

that mother's heart would be, to snatch him up in her arms, and to clasp him to her bosom; her first feeling, that of tenderness and love. Such also were the feelings of our Lord towards the impetuous, and misguided Saul. But now, that the work of mercy was effected, the guilty purpose checked, the sinner reclaimed, the heart converted, our Lord appears instantly to have resumed the majesty and dignity of his kingly office. He speaks no longer as Jesus of Nazareth, the despised and persecuted Messiah, but as the same Jesus seated on his Father's throne, the "King of kings, and Lord of lords." He speaks in the voice of authority and command; "Arise, and go into the city." 'That city which thou hadst intended to have entered in all the pride of a powerful persecutor, enter a poor, blind, conscience-stricken penitent, requiring assistance and guidance of thy companions; and there learn within those walls the truth as it is in Jesus; there thou shalt be told everything that is

needful; not only what I will have thee to do, and what I will have thee to believe, but what I will have thee to suffer.'

It was thus that the Lord vindicated His insulted honour, His persecuted followers, His despised word. A single beam from the light in which the Saviour dwelleth, might, and in a moment would, have revealed all, and more than all, that the strongest mind could bear, and the longest life could suffer; but this is not the way in which the Almighty works. All that needed miraculous interference, the arrest of Saul's guilty progress, the conversion of his heart, is done by miraculous interference; all that could be effected by merely human means and human instrumentality, is left to human means and human instrumentality to perform. Look not, then, for supernatural interpositions, my brethren, where the ordinary operations of God's providence are sufficient. A constant necessity to violate the established laws of nature's

God, would argue infinitely more of ignorance and weakness, with humility be it spoken, in the great Jehovah, than of wisdom and of strength.

"It shall be told thee." Not by me, not by a voice from heaven, not by some angel messenger, specially sent down to instruct and enlighten Saul; but by some poor, unknown, ignoble disciple, one of "*that way*," which thou hadst intended to persecute to the death; one who has himself learnt by the appointed means of grace, and by constant application at the throne of grace, all that he shall be commissioned to teach thee. Thou shalt learn lesson by lesson, and word by word, and syllable by syllable, as the poorest, and weakest, and most uninstructed of my followers, until all the pride of thy vast intellect, and all the powers of thy great mind, shall be humbled in the dust, and thou shalt have been taught to "count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus thy Lord."

Thus does God destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent, that no flesh should glory in his presence; but that he that glorieth may glory in the Lord.

Let us now inquire what had become, during these most interesting moments, of Saul's equally guilty companions? They also saw the light; they also heard the voice; were they also penitent, humble, subdued, converted? No; we have, at least, no record that they were. This was no common manifestation of God's power and mercy which we have been describing; it was one of those high days on which, as at the coronation or espousals of some earthly prince, the greatest criminals are pardoned, the most powerful rebels are set free; so here the greatest and most hardened sinner of that wicked company was selected to be made the monument of redeeming love, the chosen vessel of God's sovereign grace; while the rest were left to the common

means of grace, and the daily benignities of the Spirit of God. Observe, then, the manner in which the treatment of his companions differed from that of Saul on this great occasion. They also "heard the voice," but heard it, as the people heard that voice which came from heaven to Jesus, during the days of his flesh, so faintly, so indistinctly, that "they said it thundered." They also beheld that divine light, but the evangelist expressly says, "They saw no man;" no vision was granted to them of the divine Messiah standing in that unearthly radiance: they were terrified and speechless, but not converted.

Remarkable instance of the sovereignty of God fulfilling his promise from of old! "I will take one of a city, and two of a family, and will bring you to Zion." How often realized at the present day, and it may be in the present congregation! All hear the voice of the preacher, as all the company travelling with Saul heard the

voice which spake from heaven; but, alas! how few hear it with that distinctness of apprehension, which alone can render it valuable! How few, comparatively, receive it, in the love of it, into their hearts, and find it to be the power of God to their salvation; to how many is it, at the best, but an uncertain sound; neither "converting the soul," "nor making wise the simple?" to some may it not even be "a savour of death unto death?" to many, a mere pastime, "as when one playeth upon a very pleasant instrument."

How many, then, travel in the same company, how few arrive at the same end; how many hear the voice, how few are brought to ask in deep contrition and in lively faith, "Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?" In the remarkable case before us, he who distinctly heard the word, and clearly saw the Saviour, was converted; and be it remembered, he alone. So, must we

plainly tell you, it will be with you. You who accompany a patient and attentive hearing, with an earnest, prayerful, faithful "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith," you shall see what many prophets and kings have desired to see, and have not seen; you shall know what none shall know but they who thus seek knowledge at the fountain head, even that which our Lord himself has declared to be eternal life, namely, to "know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

Saul having arisen from the ground, still in darkness as to his bodily eyes, although so miraculously enlightened as to the eyes of his mind, is led by the hand into Damascus, and remains three days in total blindness and helplessness: our Lord thus following up his purposes of mercy to his benighted soul, and by closing the eyes of his servant to the attractions of all outward objects, turning them inward the more searchingly upon

his own heart, and upward the more unceasingly to his Redeemer's throne.

We now proceed to examine the remarkable means by which God effected his purpose, that Saul should be instructed, through the instrumentality of human teachers, and that the good work which God had begun in him should be perfected. We can readily imagine, that if it required a voice from heaven to convince Saul of the majesty and the divinity of the Saviour whom he persecuted, nothing less convincing than a voice from heaven would have satisfied the poor objects of his persecution, that Saul had undergone the wondrous change which had been effected; that the lion had become a lamb, that the persecutor was now a humble and inquiring believer. Accordingly, where miraculous assistance again was needed, miraculous assistance was again bestowed.

"There was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias." Not Peter,

or James, or John, no great and eminent apostle need be sent for, to instruct the learned and highly talented Saul; but Ananias, some poor simple-hearted Christian, of whom the divine word has never before made mention, is fully sufficient in God's hand, to teach this most richly-endowed of all the early converts. Believe then, brethren, that where the word of God is simply and faithfully preached, no want of gifts, or of talents, or of learning, on the part of a minister, shall frustrate the grace of God, or make His word of none effect. If Ananias could instruct Saul, and Aquila and Priscilla could teach Apollos, surely the wise ones of the earth may sit down quietly at the feet of the lowliest of God's appointed ministers, where the true light of the Gospel is dispensed, believing that "neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God who giveth the increase."

To the devout and holy, but in no other

way distinguished, person of whom we have spoken, even to Ananias, said the Lord in a vision, "Ananias; and he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas, for one called Saul of Tarsus." Conscious, as we all undoubtedly are, of the omniscience of the great Jehovah, perhaps we are never so much struck by it, as when He thus condescends to demonstrate it to us in His dealings with ourselves, or our fellow sinners: calling forth one man by name, describing the identical spot where another lodges. How accurately does it mark God's knowledge of all our movements, of the city, the street, the house in which we dwell; how certainly, therefore, of all that passes there! How essential, then, that the Lord should be honoured and acknowledged publicly by us within our dwellings, that their walls should be perfumed with the daily incense of prayer

and praise; that every word or action by which God can be dishonoured, or his name profaned, or his spirit of gentleness and peace grieved and frightened from our abodes, should be most earnestly, most scrupulously avoided!

But what is the language in which our Lord revealed to Ananias the employment in which Saul was at that moment engaged? "Behold, he prayeth!" Was this remarkable? Was it singular, that he who, after the straitest sect of their religion, had lived a Pharisee, should bend his knees in prayer? No. Had this been all, it would never have been bequeathed to us in holy writ. Saul had unquestionably, for years together, performed these outward exercises of devotion, and repeated daily many a prayer to God; but now he *prayed.* The prayer of a converted heart, the prayer of faith, for the first time passed his lips, and was thus recorded by his God, "Behold, he prayeth!"

My brethren, has your gracious Redeemer, to whom every action of your life, every thought of your heart, are most fully and entirely known, has he ever yet been able to declare this of you? You have said many prayers; have you ever prayed? You have joined even this day in many a confession of sin, and guilt, and misery, within these walls; have those confessions issued from a broken, a contrite, and a converted heart? We trust they have, we doubt not in many instances they most assuredly have; but if there be one among you who has hitherto contented himself with the mere service of the lips, who has neither sought nor received the spirit of prayer and supplication, who has read or repeated morning after morning, and evening after evening, a form of sound words, which have not influenced the thoughts, and the wishes, and the affections; have not been aided by the Spirit of God, and offered, with a lively faith in the Son of God; let

him learn from the example before us, their utter uselessness and inefficiency. In the sight of God that man has never prayed. Begin then, in earnest, this day; offer this very hour, before you leave this house, your first prayer, and the God who heareth prayer, for His dear Son's sake, will neither disregard nor deny your petition.

While the example before us may, by divine grace, be thus made useful in convincing the formalist, may it not also be applied in comforting the humble penitent? Your heart has been really touched by the quickening power of God's good Spirit; you have been humbled and proved, to show you "the plague of your own heart,"[1] and to lead you to the fountain opened for its healing. You have ofttimes withdrawn from the bustle of the world around you, and when no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, you have poured out your soul in the retire-

[1] 1 Kings viii. 38.

ment of your own chamber before your God. Perhaps you have sometimes risen from your knees, with a soul but little refreshed, with a heart but little comforted, almost with the feeling that such poor, weak, faltering, faithless petitions have never ascended to your Father's throne; yet at that very hour, and of that very service, has your Redeemer said in tenderness and love, "Behold, he prayeth!" and has prepared an answer of mercy for your soul.

Ananias, alarmed at the well-known character of Saul, and afraid to visit him, remonstrates thus, more naturally than faithfully, with the Almighty: "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." 'Ought I thus to cast the pearl before swine? Ought I to endanger myself for that, which in all human probability is so little likely to improve

or benefit him?' "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

Saul had anxiously inquired, "What wouldest thou have me to *do?*" Our Lord sends his ministers to tell him, not what great things he shall do, but what far greater things he shall *suffer*. Sufferings are, after all, the great achievements of the Christian. Where one man is permitted to effect mighty things for his Lord, by carrying the words of the everlasting Gospel over the burning sands of Africa, or the frozen mountains of the North, thousands and tens of thousands are called to the high privilege of the Philippians of old, "not only to believe, but also to suffer, for His name's sake." To sit on His right hand and on His left, are not now to be given; but to drink of His cup of trial,

and to be baptized with His baptism of affliction, are still among the choicest blessings which He bestows upon His people. Be not then disappointed, my beloved brethren, if with every desire to do great things for your divine Master, you are denied the power or the opportunity. If, as has been beautifully said,

"They also serve, who only stand and wait,"

how much more do they serve, who are called upon to endure and to suffer! Yes; in the chamber of sickness, upon the bed of pain, you may as greatly glorify your Redeemer, as amid the trials of the mission, or the tortures of the stake. And often does it please your heavenly Father that, while you are meditating what great things you shall do for Christ, He is preparing the great things you shall suffer. Endeavour, therefore, to live in such a spiritual frame of mind, that you may be daily willing, at the bidding of your Lord, to take up the cross, and to follow His

footsteps, though they may lead you through many a toilsome track, or guide you through many a thorny passage. In your journey to the heavenly country, you must encounter trials, and troubles, and sorrows; no child of God was ever yet without them: not one of all that countless multitude in white robes, with palms in their hands, but "came out of great tribulation;" how can you, therefore, expect or desire to escape that, of which all the other children in God's dear family have so largely partaken? "Think it not, therefore, strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." Dwell much and frequently, upon the views of that "eternal weight of glory;" it will tend more than any other consideration to teach you to form a correct and scriptural estimate

of your "light afflictions." It was thus, that the apostle of whom we are speaking, at a later period of his Christian course, was enabled to bear, and to bear without repining, an infinitely heavier load of suffering than will ever be laid on you. He cast all his trials, all his sorrows, all his sufferings, into one scale, and after consideration of them, declares them to be light, and but for a moment. He then lays the glory in the other scale, and pronounces it to be ponderous, weighty, and eternal: "an exceeding weight of glory." In the one is sorrow for a little while, in the other, eternal joy: in the one, pain for a few moments, in the other, everlasting rest: in the one is the loss of some few temporary delights, in the other, the full fruition of God in Christ, who "is all in all."

LECTURE III.

Acts ix. 20.

"AND STRAIGHTWAY HE PREACHED CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUES, THAT HE IS THE SON OF GOD."

Our subject this morning opens with the account of the interview between Ananias and Saul, for which both had been supernaturally prepared, by the visions to which we referred in our last discourse.

"And Ananias," says the historian, "went his way, and entered into the house, and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul"—What a salutation was this, from one of the meek and lowly followers of our Lord to this "persecutor and blas-

phemer!" "Brother Saul!" Without reluctance and without delay, he salutes that man as a brother, whom God had so astonishingly acknowledged as a son. He requires no further introduction, no further testimony, but gives at once the right hand of fellowship, and with it, his affections and his heart.

How does such an example put to shame the cold, unkindly feelings of the Christians of the present day. It is not enough for them to know that a man is a Christian, to induce them to acknowledge him as a brother; they must know every clause in his creed, every feature of his religious character; they must hear him pronounce with the most unquestionable distinctness, the shibboleth of their own party; he must believe, not simply all that he can discern in the word of God, but all that they can discern there, even to their latest discovery, to the revelation of yesterday, or he is no brother of theirs. Verily the

bounds of discipleship, are drawn so closely together in these our days, that a modern Ananias, instead of going his way, and hailing this poor convert as a disciple indeed, because the Lord had said, "He is a chosen vessel unto me," would have replied, 'Nay, but, O Lord, does he believe all that I believe? has he seen the great things that I have seen out of thy word? for if not, I cannot give him the right hand of fellowship; I cannot call him brother.'

My brethren, beware of these contracted views of Christian fellowship, which are daily dividing the seamless garment of our Lord into the veriest shreds and tatters; learn to make no distinction, except that which the converted Paul himself made in after days, when he said, "Grace be with all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Let this be the broad platform of your Christian friendship; let every minor point, whether of doctrine or of

discipline, be merged in this—in every lover of your Redeemer recognise a friend; to the feeblest lamb of His fold stretch out a helping hand; to the weakest of His true and sincere followers, offer a sympathizing heart. Among the members of our Lord's blessed family, among the sheep of His "little flock," there should be no divisions, no distinctions: our language to all, however they may differ from us in the non-essentials of our holy religion, should be, if a chosen vessel, if a child of God, then a fellow-heir of the same grace, an expectant of the same glory; a brother here, a more than brother throughout eternity.

Ananias continued, "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost."

"The Lord, even Jesus;"—this must have been the first time that Saul had ever heard that name with feelings such

as it awakened then. He had, until within the three preceding days, never heard it without abhorrence and execration. The last time it fell upon his ear, in those celestial accents, from that throne of light, it had come with accusations to his heart, as the voice of his enemy and his judge; it is now the message of a deliverer and a friend. After three days of blindness and trembling, without consolation and without food, he hears this message of mercy, "The Lord, even JESUS, hath sent me," 'not to destroy, not to wound, not even to remind thee of thy guilt, but to restore thy sight, and to bestow upon thee the gift of the Holy Ghost,'—"and immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales." How blessed a demonstration of our Lord's compassionate tenderness and almighty love!

It is thus, that even at the present day, and at the present hour, the same Jesus binds up the heart, when broken

with a sense of sin, comforts the spirit when oppressed with a consciousness of guilt, strengthens the bruised reed, and fans into a flame the smoking flax.

How often, although we see not (as we do in the present instance, since the visions of Saul and Ananias are recorded,) the spiritual apparatus by which it is brought about, there is as much contrivance to send a messenger of peace to some poor nameless sinner, as there was here to the great and powerful Saul.

A minister, or a visitor, goes, perhaps as he imagines accidentally, to the house of some sick, or suffering, or soul-stricken penitent, and is made the blessed instrument of carrying to that soul the message of peace and consolation. Can you doubt who sends him? When the scales fall from off your eyes, can you doubt whose hand is there? No; though you will gratefully receive the servant, you will not overlook the Master who stands beside him. You will address your prayer to

Him, "Lord, that I might receive my sight;" to Him, and to Him alone, will you refer all the praise and all the glory.

The narrative continues—"and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized; and when he had received meat, he was strengthened."

Thus was the work of mercy perfected; Saul, who from the moment he was struck to the earth, and cried, "Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?" had been converted to the faith of Jesus, was now bound to Him by the outward ordinance of baptism, and blessed by the inward and spiritual grace of the Holy Ghost. "As for God," says the Psalmist, "His way is perfect." As it was with regard to Saul, so is it with regard to every child in His redeemed family, so will it be with yourselves. We do not mean to say that conviction is conversion—that no sooner are you made sensible of your sinfulness than all is perfected; far from it; there is often deep

conviction of sin filling the mind and agonizing the heart for a season, yet never extending beyond this first, and essentially necessary feeling. But we must assert, because we believe that the word of God has revealed the comforting and consolatory truth, that where this conviction of sin is followed by a complete renunciation of self-will, and a simple heartfelt desire of conformity to the divine will, with a penitent, believing "looking unto Jesus" as "the way the truth and life," there the Lord will, as David expresses it, "perfect that which concerneth you, and not forsake the work of His own hands." Like Saul, you may be left for days together in darkness and helplessness, but your deliverance shall come, it shall not tarry; the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, and the dews of the Spirit shall descend upon you, and the scales shall fall from off your eyes, and you shall be brought to your Saviour and to your God, and united to Him with a love which shall never fail

you, but which shall shine more and more upon your path, until it terminate in "the light which no man may approach unto;" where "you shall see as you are seen, and know as you are known." Blessed consummation! full and ample return for all that you have feared, and all that you have suffered here; the first hour spent in that blessed place, in that beloved and happy company, will more, infinitely more than compensate for all the days of darkness which the gloomiest lot on earth has ever numbered. All will be forgotten in that first bright and happy hour, the toils of the way, the dangers of the conflict, the disgraces of many a defeat, the sorrow of many a short-coming, all, so far at least as affects their painful remembrance, will be forgotten in those realms of bliss, and the love of Him who called you, guided you, kept you, sanctified and at last glorified you, will be alone remembered.

The first public evidence which Saul

afforded of the remarkable change that had taken place, is thus recorded; "Saul was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus;" with those very men, therefore, for whose destruction he had gone thither, he now associates in habits of intimacy and Christian friendship.

How complete, then, must have been the change wrought by the Spirit of God in the heart of Saul! If it had been said to him, during the early days of his journey, 'The time is not far distant, when you shall confess, and love, and preach, and die for, that hallowed name which you now abhor;' Saul would have started from the thought, as from the committal of some deadly sin. But had it been still further added, 'Yea, within one little week, you will desire no better associates, and no dearer friends, than the poor despised, illiterate, followers of Jesus!' Saul, the Pharisee, trusting in himself that he was righteous, and despising others, even of

his own persuasion, but hating others, when those others bore the name of Christ! would have almost replied with Hazael of old, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this?" And yet, behold the change this little week has brought: we hear no more of the company of worldly men, of the persecutors who travelled with him; we do not find them ministering unto him during his days of suffering; his only attendant was Ananias, his only companions, and his only friends, were the disciples of the Nazarene! He who had so lately persecuted them even to the death, now said with Ruth of old, "Whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

Yes, such was in effect the declaration, for such was really the conduct, of the converted Saul. Great as was the difference in talent, in station, in attainment, between him and them, there

was one thing in common, and that one, the blessed subject which occupied every thought, and filled to overflowing every heart, the one strong bond of union before which all weaker ties were rent asunder—the love and the name of Jesus. Learned, and highly intellectual, as was Saul himself, he had now been taught to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord;" he was, therefore, well content to want all those qualifications in his new associates, which he had once so greatly prized, since he found, what far surpassed them all, sterling piety to God, deep devotedness to the Son of God, goodwill to every member of the family of man, spirituality of heart and heavenly affections, a life spent in God's service here, a hope full of immortality hereafter. So will it also be with you, my brethren; if you are really reconciled to God, His people will be your people, His friends your

friends; you will esteem even the lowest, and the poorest, and the least informed of His followers, with affectionate regard, for that portion of the image of their divine Master, which you see reflected upon them, and are enabled to trace in their life and conversation. You will form your friendships and establish your intimacies among them, and them alone. A certain degree of intercourse you may and must tolerate, with the people of the world; but your hearts and your affections, the communion which you delight and rejoice in, will be as Saul's was, "*with the disciples;*" as David's, "with the excellent of the earth, in whom was all his delight;" with those who can help forward the life of faith, and the work of divine love, in your cold and sluggish hearts. Believe me, you will need every aid, and therefore must not despise the smallest, which God or man can afford you, on the heavenward path; there are hills of difficulty, where the arm of a

Christian friend may afford you great support; there are hours of battle, when his shield may be spread over you for safety; there are "sloughs of despond," where his hand may be permitted to draw you out. For although you must be careful never so to look, or so to lean upon any human friend, as to forget for a moment that "friend that sticketh closer than a brother," you may, and God has mercifully intended that you should, avail yourself of every innocent and scriptural aid, during your passage through this toilsome wilderness.

"Our backwardness is such," said an eminently pious man of old,[1] "that we need the most constant and powerful helps. A stone or a clod is as fit to rise and fly in the air, as our hearts are naturally to move toward heaven. You need not *hinder* the rocks from flying up to the sky; it is sufficient that you do not *help* them: and surely if our

[1] Baxter. See Works, vol. ii. p. 240, fol.

spirits have not great assistance, they may easily be kept from flying upwards, though they should never meet with the least impediment. O, think of this in the choice of your company! When your spirits are so disposed for heaven, that you need no help to lift them up, but, as flames, you are always mounting, and carrying with you all that is in your way, then, indeed, you may be less careful of your company; but till then, as you love the delights of heaven, be careful whom you know, whom you love, whom you delight in."

After speaking of Saul's first associates in Damascus, the inspired writer proceeds to speak of his first employments there: "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

St. Paul began at once upon his high and heavenly errand. He did not satisfy himself with recommending a round of moral duties, with propounding a beautiful system of ethics; he did not content

himself with declaring even that Christ was the Messiah, the Prophet that should come: he preached at once the great leading truth of the Gospel, that Christ was the only begotten Son of the Father, truly and properly God, of the same nature and essence as God the Father, co-equal to Him, and co-eternal with Him;—the great truth for which our Lord was persecuted even unto the death, which every disciple asserted, and which the orthodox Church of God has in all ages maintained. Saul preached this boldly and unflinchingly, and all the life-giving and saving doctrines which flow from it. The great doctrine of the atonement, that Christ died for our sins, to purchase to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; of the resurrection, that He rose again for our justification; of the intercession, that He ever liveth to make intercession for us; of His coming again, that He may judge the world, and save His people. He knew,

he felt, he preached, he gloried in them all. His heart was full of Christ, and "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." From the subject which he then promulgated, he never afterwards digressed; that boundless subject filled his thoughts, his heart, his mind, his sermons, his epistles; quickened his spirits during life, comforted his soul in death. It was his one, his only theme on earth—it has long been, and shall for ever be, his one, his only theme in the mansions of eternity. "Brethren, pray for us," that something of this oneness of subject, this singleness of view, may be ours, that the Lord Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, in all the length, and depth, and breadth, and height of this stupendous subject, may be the beginning, and the middle, and the end of all our ministrations.

While this was the apostle's theme, we cannot be surprised to be told that he "increased the more in strength, and

confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this was the very Christ."

If we, as preachers, desire to produce these effects, the confounding of our spiritual adversaries, the increase of strength in our own souls; if you, as hearers, desire to participate in them, be assured that we must be content with this one subject; and as the Reformers of old were contemptuously called, by the learned Erasmus, "men of one book," because they read but the Bible, so we must be content to be called, 'men of one subject,' and to preach but Jesus Christ.

It seems extremely probable, that at this point in the narrative, between St. Paul's first preaching Christ in the synagogues at Damascus, and the persecution mentioned in the succeeding verse, the event occurred which is thus related by himself in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians: "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's

womb," says the great apostle, "and called me, by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, but I went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus; then after three years I went up to Jerusalem." Between the events of these two verses, therefore, three years intervened, of which the Spirit of God has given us no particulars, beyond the single fact, that during that period St. Paul withdrew, for a certain time, into Arabia, and this as he himself says, "immediately" upon his conversion; not to confer with "flesh and blood," but to hold converse with the Father of our spirits, the God of light and truth; not to betake himself to the broken cisterns of human instruction, but to draw the water of life freely, from the overflowing fountain. It was, doubtless, during this temporary sojourn in a strange land, that the great apostle was prepared, by close

and frequent intercourse with his God, by intimate communings with his Redeemer, and by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, for the arduous ministry upon which he had entered.

Surely, my Christian brethren, an important lesson may be gathered even from the little hints which have been thus left us of this long period of the apostle's course, viz., the absolute necessity, even in the most occupied walk of human existence, of retiring at stated times, for more direct, and close, and intimate communion with our God.

Valuable as are the public ordinances of the Church, improving as is the converse of Christian friends, beneficial as is the counsel of spiritual advisers; all these will fail of their intention, if they be not accompanied by occasional periods of absolute solitude, and more than ordinary intercourse with the great Jehovah. I do not now merely allude to the necessary and obvious duties of morning and

evening prayer, I am advocating something more than this: I mean an occasional setting apart of hours to the great purpose of spiritual exercises. It is said of Luther, that with all the immensity of his labours, and the variety of his overwhelming anxieties, he invariably dedicated the three best hours of every day to God. This may often not be possible; but it is possible, quite possible, to enjoy far more than the generality of Christians even endeavour to do, of the presence of the Lord Jehovah. Without it your spirits will starve in the midst of the richest spiritual abundance, and it will fare with you in heavenly things, as with the Israelites of old in earthly things; God may give you your heart's desire, in the abundance of outward ordinances, and yet "send leanness withal into your souls." [1]

There is a passage in one of the most eloquent of our prelates,[2] upon the im-

[1] Psalm cvi. 15.

[2] Bp. Jer. Taylor's Christian Consolations. See Works, vol. i. p. 145, edit. 1822.

portance of this species of intercourse with God, which expresses, what I would recommend, in language so beautiful, as well as so appropriate, and so likely to leave an abiding impression upon the memory of my hearers, that I shall make no apology for its quotation. "Prayer is the key to open the day, and the bolt to shut in the night. But as the skies drop the early dew, and the evening dew upon the grass; yet it would not spring and grow green, by that constant and double falling of the dew, unless some great showers, at certain seasons, did supply the rest; so the customary devotion of prayer twice a day, is the falling of the early and the latter dew; but if you will increase and flourish in the works of grace, *empty the great clouds sometimes*, and let them fall into a full shower of prayer: choose out the seasons, in your own discretion, when prayer shall overflow, like Jordan in the time of harvest."

"Choose out the seasons," my brethren, but do not, because this may be done at

any time, neglect it altogether. Many are the seasons when it is not only a privilege, but a duty: on the eve of great undertakings, as with St .Paul; in the time of doubt and difficulty, as with Daniel; when harassed and oppressed by temporal anxieties, as with David; when enjoying a peculiar share of the good things of this life, and of the mercy and loving-kindness of our God, as with Isaac; when under particular trial or sorrow, as with our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Your own experience will tell you, that there are few lives, in which such opportunities are long absent, many in which they continually recur. Do I address any at the present moment, who are suffering under circumstances more than usually trying, who see no escape by human means, who know no refuge by human wisdom, to whom it appears equally arduous, equally impossible to advance or to retreat; the backward way closed in behind you with difficulties, the

forward path hedged up before you by your foes; then thank God, and take courage, the upward way is still open, never so widely open, as when all other ways are closed. "Cease ye from man," retire, even from the company of the disciples, and betake yourself to God, and to Him alone; spread your case fully, unreservedly, before His infinite wisdom, and His infinite love; omit nothing in the recital; let your follies, your ignorances, your sins, all find a place there; "empty the great clouds, and let them fall in a full shower of prayer;" and through the intercession of His beloved Son, your heavenly Father will send an answer of peace into your souls.

LECTURE IV.

ACTS IX. 26.

"AND WHEN SAUL WAS COME TO JERUSALEM, HE ESSAYED TO JOIN HIMSELF TO THE DISCIPLES; BUT THEY WERE ALL AFRAID OF HIM, AND BELIEVED NOT THAT HE WAS A DISCIPLE."

AFTER the return of St. Paul from that sojourn in Arabia, with which our last lecture concluded, we find that he remained some time longer in Damascus, until the persecution in that city obliged him, at the close of the third year of his ministry, to seek safety in flight. The manner in which this was effected, is related in the chapter before us, and again still more circumstantially in the eleventh chapter of the second epistle to

the Corinthians, where St. Paul says, "In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king, kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me; and through a window in a basket, was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands."

When we consider the natural character of Saul, his undaunted boldness, his unquenchable spirit; and when we add to this, that the event before us happened in the early years of his apostleship, when the zeal and energy of first conversion were at their height, and when, as we have just been informed, he was preaching Christ with such success, that he was strengthening his friends and confounding his enemies; there are few circumstances of his history, which strike us with deeper astonishment than this escape from Damascus. It was so little characteristic of the man, so contrary to the conduct of those, who in after days, when persecuted for the same faith, crowded

the tribunals, and contended with zealous, but unscriptural anxiety, for the honours of martyrdom, that we must seek the source of it in some deeper and more hidden spring, than the dictates of natural inclination or of carnal policy. Small as is the progress which we have yet made in his history, of this we are certain, that had St. Paul followed the natural impulse of his disposition, he would have infinitely preferred persevering in the labours in which he was engaged, although they should lead to the prison or the stake, to this abrupt conclusion of them. My brethren, we find the source of this action of St. Paul, in that great and blessed degree of conformity of his own will to the divine will, to which he had already attained. "When they persecute you in one city, flee into another," were the words of our Lord; directions which, in the infancy of the church, were not merely most important to the spread of Christianity throughout the world, but

essentially and absolutely necessary to its very existence; yet at the same time, directions more difficult of fulfilment, from the self-devoted spirits upon whom they were impressed, than perhaps any other injunction of their departed Lord.

It will probably be said, that there is small need of such direction in these our days; and yet be assured,—and I now only speak to the true and devoted follower of the Lord Jesus Christ,—be assured, that such counsel is not altogether unnecessary, even at the present hour; for however paradoxical it may appear, we cannot doubt that it often requires far more faith to spare yourself at Christ's command, than to spend yourself in His service. Are you, for instance, engaged in active scenes of usefulness? do you find your highest pleasure in devoting your time, your strength, your talents, to promote the glory of God? and are you suddenly called away from such a station, and compelled to be silent and unem-

ployed?—it is one of the highest efforts of faith to acquiesce patiently, and cheerfully, in such a dispensation; those natural feelings which yet remain unsubdued, even in the renewed heart, rise almost in open rebellion at the thought; their language is, 'I could bear any thing, do any thing, suffer any thing but this:' how obvious is it, then, that this is the very trial most peculiarly fitted to you, this is just the chastening which you need, to bring you nearer in heart, and soul, and likeness, to your divine Master. But if this be, as it assuredly is, a grievous and difficult trial to every sincere follower of our Lord, how peculiarly is it so, to a minister of His everlasting gospel! To be obliged, whether, as in the case of St. Paul, from hostility and persecution, or, as with many among ourselves, from a deficiency of health or strength, to leave the scene of his labours: to cease from those blessed ministrations, the greatest source of pleasure to himself if they tend

in any, the smallest, degree to the profit of the souls committed to his charge, and to the glory of his Lord; to give up those duties in which his soul delights; to "stand all the day idle in the market-place," while his more privileged fellow-labourers are sent to work in the vine-yard; to be laid aside in a state of idle-ness and inactivity, while others are permitted to "bear the burden and heat of the day;"—yes, brethren, this is indeed a trial of faith, far greater than the heaviest burden, or the severest suffering. In saying this, I am stating no imaginary case: it has been the salutary lot of many of us, for weeks and months together, to realize this painful truth. Let us, then, earnestly pray, that, while we have the ability, we may have the desire to dedi-cate all that we possess to this holy and happy service; that "whatsoever our hand findeth to do, we may do it with our might;" that we may have grace to devote our time, our strength, our labour, unre-

servedly to the great cause in which, as minister and congregation, we are mutually embarked; but that where they fall short, as, alas! they unceasingly do, infinitely short of that which our great and important duties require, or where they are, by the will of God, for a time suspended, we may possess sufficient confidence in the glorified Head of the Church, to rely with cheerful contentment upon His disposal of us, believing that the salvation of His people is, from first to last, His own work, and His own charge, which he has taken voluntarily upon Himself, and needs not such poor, weak, miserable instruments as we are, to carry to perfection.

Saul, finding that, by the will of God, the door of usefulness was thus abruptly closed against him at Damascus, proceeded to Jerusalem. He had been driven out of Damascus by the enemies of Christ, he was disowned at Jerusalem by His friends; for we are told that he "essayed

to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." When we remember, that the last time Saul had visited Jerusalem, he had been seen "entering into every house, and haling men and women, and committing them to prison," "for the sake of Jesus;" when we recollect that he had left the city "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," armed with a commission from the high priest to bring "all of this way bound unto Jerusalem;" and when we call to mind, moreover, the very little facility of communication which existed in those days between distant places, we cannot feel surprised that Saul was called upon to experience this new trial of which the evangelist informs us. It was a natural and a pardonable timidity in the disciples to stand aloof, for a time at least, from one whom they had so much greater reason to fear as an enemy, than to love

as a friend. No sooner, however, had Barnabas taken Saul to the apostles, i. e., to Peter and James, who, we find, from the first chapter of the Galatians, were the only apostles in Jerusalem at that time, and had declared unto them the wonderful conversion of which Saul had been the subject, than they cordially gave him the right hand of fellowship, and he was with them "at their coming in and going out." It is pleasing to see, that while the disciples, the body of believers in general, doubted the sincerity of the new convert, the apostles, the oldest and most experienced among them, were the most speedily reconciled. The warm-hearted Peter, in particular, must have remembered, that the days had been when the disciples might have looked with an eye of quite as much suspicion upon him as he was now looking upon Saul; when they might have been as justly afraid of him, who had three times denied his Lord, as he could possibly be of Saul, who had

persecuted that same Lord; when even his divine Master had implied either a doubt, or a reproof, in the thrice-repeated question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" He could not have forgotten how deeply "grieved" he had felt, that he should have been asked a third time, "Lovest thou me?" and the recollection must have opened his heart, with a mingled feeling of compunction and love, to the suspected Saul. Peter may have thought within himself,—If my Master had been half as unwilling to recognise my repentance, as I have been to credit the conversion of this my erring brother, those tears of bitterness would have been followed by a life of misery and anguish:—and the very thought must have induced him to receive the converted persecutor with a kindness unequalled even by any other apostle, since none could sympathize so entirely with the penitent Saul, as the converted Peter.[1] It forms a very pleasing, and rather a

[1] See Luke xxii. 32.

striking corroboration of this view to discover, from the first chapter to the Galatians, that Saul abode with *Peter* during the whole of his short sojourn at this time at Jerusalem.

My brethren, be assured that there is no better proof of a real love to Christ in yourselves, than a willingness to hail with pleasure, the first evidences of it in those around you. Do you observe, for instance, in any of your friends or acquaintances, an awakening desire after the things of God, and increasing love to Jesus, an advancing knowledge or inclination to walk more "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world;" and have you known them under other and widely different circumstances? Be not suspicious, on that account, of their sincerity and good intention now; having ascertained, so far as you are able, that they are in earnest, do not hesitate to encourage them in the good work: recommend them useful books; induce

them to see and converse with their ministers; aid them to the utmost of your powers, in that which must always be an arduous task—the commencement of a religious walk and conversation. It is truly distressing to think, how many there are who have been, for a long time, checked at the threshold of vital godliness, by the cold reserve, or lukewarmness, or suspicion, of sincere, but misjudging Christians. If you would but consider, my brethren, how prominent, and how beautiful a feature in our Lord's dealings with yourselves, is His readiness to receive the returning sinner, seeing him "while yet a great way off," and having compassion on him, and meeting him with every demonstration of tenderness and love, you would be more willing to receive an erring, but truly penitent and really converted brother. It is not easy to imagine how bitterly painful must be the feelings of those whose secret sighing has been heard by the gracious and com-

passionate Redeemer, and whose repentance has been accepted before God, to find themselves shunned and avoided by His, perhaps in reality, not less guilty creatures; to be looking to the same Saviour, and ransomed by the same blood, and sanctified by the same Spirit, and preparing for the same heaven as yourselves, and yet to be shunned, and discountenanced, and coldly entreated here.

We may picture to ourselves something of these feelings of disappointment and distress, by imagining the feelings of Saul, when he came fresh from the persecution and contempt of the Jews at Damascus, to cast himself, as it were, with brotherly affection into the arms of the Christians in Jerusalem, and found himself most unexpectedly repulsed and rejected. Every heart closed against him, every disciple afraid of him; this very fact alone, if the spiritual work within him had not, indeed, been a divine and decisive one, would have been almost

sufficient to have made him once more "a persecutor and a blasphemer." We would, therefore, say to you, as the Almighty said to Israel of old, "Love ye the stranger, for ye were strangers in the land," strangers once in this good land, although you are now, by the undeserved blessing of your God, "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and are built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." "Ye know," by experience, "the heart of a stranger," its fears, its anxieties, its disquietudes; all the numberless difficulties, and perpetually recurring troubles, which perplexed your own mind and conscience, when first entering upon the heavenward path; therefore, feel for those who are placed by divine grace in the same situation, give them freely and unreservedly your sympathy, your counsel, your friendship,

and your prayers; if there be nothing in themselves to recommend them, there is much in their present situation—forlorn and destitute—with many a woe, and many a temptation awaiting them; there is still more in their future prospects—glorious and elevating—when they shall sit down with you in the kingdom of their Father; and most of all in the consideration, that every drop of that blood which was shed for you, was as freely shed for them; and that He who shed it, knows no distinction between the strongest and the feeblest of those who are, indeed, His followers, since his own grace, and that alone, has made them what they are.

Saul having now, by the kind intervention of Barnabas, been received into the closest Christian union with the apostles of our Lord, began to "speak boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus" at Jerusalem, as he had before done at Damascus. He hoped, no doubt, that

an enlarged measure of success would attend his ministry in this city, where his previous life, and habits, and education, were so universally known, and that the miracle of his conversion would here form an irresistible argument to the truth of his doctrine. Very different, however, are the intentions of God respecting our future disposal, from the intentions of ourselves and our friends. Saul, perhaps, expected to spend many years at Jerusalem; the Almighty had appointed that he should remain there fifteen days.

How often in our own experience, and in the experience of those around us, do we realize similar disappointments! We fix our thoughts and hearts upon some wished-for situation, or perhaps some desirable connexion, and say within ourselves, 'Here will I dwell; here is a post of usefulness where I may live and labour happily and profitably for the glory of God;' or, 'Here is a quiet spot, in some degree free from the tumult and troubles

of the world; here will I establish myself in peace and permanency.' The thought has hardly been matured within our breast, the words have scarcely passed our lips, when the sentence of the Lord goes forth, the cords of our tent are severed, its stakes plucked up, its canvass furled, and we are once more driven forth, to resume our march amid the drought and sands of the desert. When will these things teach us to sit more loosely by the things of earth, to cleave more closely to the things of heaven; to believe that there is nothing durable, nothing permanent, but God himself, and those good things which He has prepared for them that love Him?

In the passage before us, it is merely said that Saul spake "boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; but they went about to slay him. Which, when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cesarea, and sent him to Tarsus." St. Paul himself, however, gives a far more

circumstantial account of the same event in his recital of his conversion, in the 22d chapter of the Acts, by a reference to which we shall find that his short sojourn of fifteen days only at Jerusalem, was in pursuance of a direct command of the Most High.

He tells us there, in the 17th verse, "It came to pass, that when I was come again to Jerusalem," after having left it to carry on the persecution at Damascus, and having been absent three years, "even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance, and saw Him, saying unto me, Make haste, and get quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee; and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." As if he had

said, in answer to our Lord's declaration, that his testimony would not be received in Jerusalem, 'Surely, Lord, if they will hear anybody they will hear me; for they cannot but remember that three years ago I was as violent a persecutor as the most bigoted among themselves; when, therefore, they see the gracious change which thou hast wrought in me, they will not, they cannot, close their ears to testimony such as mine!'

Our Lord, who knows the hearts of his creatures, knew that such reasoning was vain, and therefore immediately replied, "Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."

How much better does the great Head of the church know the station adapted to the powers and labours of his ministers, than they themselves! While Saul imagined that his arguments would be unanswerable, his preaching irresistible to the Jews, his divine Master knew that they would be valued and improved

only by the Gentiles, to whom he was to be the appointed messenger. He, therefore, suffers him not to cast his pearls before swine, but to reserve them for those who being "willing in the day of God's power," should cheerfully part with all that they possessed to purchase them. While the departure of Saul appears to have been productive of a blessing, which his presence at that time, and under his peculiar circumstances, was little calculated to promote, for the evangelist adds, "Then had the churches rest, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied:" a calm succeeded the storm, which the appearance of Saul in so different a character from that which he had once borne in Jerusalem had raised; the church had peace from outward enemies, and enjoyed for a little season a foretaste of that "rest which remaineth for the people of God."

Thus it is also, my beloved brethren, with ourselves. Our trials may be varied and numerous; wave may follow wave, until we are almost tempted to believe that they will never cease; and yet, amidst the darkness of the storm, our God is preparing for us the bright and placid sunshine. How blessed is the thought that even here such seasons are not unfrequent to the children of his redeemed family; that there are many moments of happiness which the world knows not of, in store for you: many hours of the quiet, peaceful enjoyment of the approving presence of your Lord and Saviour, of which even the humblest and poorest among you may partake, and in which the richest and the noblest well might envy you; many days, when engaged even in the common occupations of life, carrying the lessons of our holy religion into consistent and godly practice, you may possess "a joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not;" and all this, not a forestalling of the peace which is in store for you, but

a foretaste of it; not an anticipation in lieu of the reality, but an earnest of your future inheritance, making it only the more certain and the more dear.

But if these short and transient glimpses of the future rest be so delightful to you, what will be that rest itself? When you shall cease from sin, as certainly as from sorrow; when every burden shall be removed; when the whole church now militant, shall have joined the church triumphant, and in one peaceful and blessed company shall unite in the heavenly chorus, "This God is our God for ever and ever," and we have found rest for our souls. May that Saviour, who has purchased this inheritance for us with His precious blood, prepare us for it by his sanctifying Spirit, and grant "that we with all those that are departed in the true faith of His holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in His eternal and everlasting glory."[1]

[1] Burial Service.

LECTURE V.

ACTS XIII. 7.

"THE DEPUTY OF THE COUNTRY, SERGIUS PAULUS, A PRUDENT MAN; WHO CALLED FOR BARNABAS AND SAUL, AND DESIRED TO HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD."

WE found St. Paul, at the close of the last lecture, leaving Jerusalem, in consequence of a divine command, and retiring for a time to his native city, Tarsus. There he remained for several years, of which no record is bequeathed to us; but which were, doubtless, spent in promoting the glory, and extending the kingdom of that Redeemer to whose service he was now so entirely devoted. When we say

that they were doubtless so spent, we do not even feel that we are hazarding a conjecture; it was impossible for Saul to return to the place of his nativity, with a heart truly converted to the knowledge and the love of the Saviour, without sacrificing all he possessed, to extend that knowledge and that love among his family, his kinsfolk, and his friends.

Nothing is told us of the result; perhaps there was nothing favourable to communicate—a prophet is not always honoured in his own country, and in his own house. But this will not deter you, my brethren, if you have obtained "like precious faith," with Saul, from endeavouring to disseminate it among your relatives and friends; you will find it impossible to confine it to your own thoughts and your own bosoms, even were you so disposed. As we read of Jeremiah, "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart as

a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay," so will it be with you. You may not be successful, you may not even be patiently listened to, but you assuredly will not be silent, your own heart will burn within you, with the great and blessed truths you have received; whether those around you will hear, or whether they will forbear, you will speak, and love to speak, of the name of Jesus. Let me then ask, Is it so with you? When in the society of those, over whom you possess the influence of authority, or of affection, do you endeavour to employ that influence for God? Do you seek, anxiously, prayerfully seek, for opportunities of usefulness to their souls? We hear men of great business and occupation frequently speak of making time for everything which they consider essentially necessary. Ought not, then, the Christian to make opportunities for a purpose such as this? Our great and spiritual enemy is never so

much upon the watch to frustrate all intentions of usefulness, as just at the moment when an opportunity appears to be opening to us; while we are, when in society, perhaps timidly deliberating, the conversation takes some sudden turn, and all hope of promoting the spiritual good of those with whom we converse is at an end. This may be the work of Satan; but it is too frequently entirely our own fault, and our own sin, that it is so completely successful. A little more resolution, a little more courage, or rather a little more faith, a little more love to God, and a little less fear of man, and we should have persevered, at the risk even of cold looks and uninterested hearers, and have at least cleared our own consciences, if we had not benefited our friends.

We have no doubt that Saul found his residence at Tarsus the most difficult, and perhaps the least profitable portion of his ministry. Christians usually find

that the most difficult sphere of usefulness is among their own immediate relations; but this is not sufficient reason that a true soldier and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ should shrink from his duty; it is rather a reason that, casting himself upon the strong for strength, he should persevere with redoubled energy. Would you know where you stand in the religious course, here is a trying test for you, a test to which, I fear, few of us can submit with comfort, or from which few can come forth with satisfaction. Can you return to the place of your nativity, or to your friends, your family, your husband, your wife, and keep silence willingly and habitually upon these great topics? Are they, in fact, the only subjects upon which you are not eloquent? and is this silence no matter of regret, of self-reproach, or self-humiliation, of constant confession before God, and of fervent prayer? Do you satisfy yourself under the omission, with the thought that the time will come

when you shall be more active, more bold, more faithful? If this be the case, look carefully into your own heart, and endeavour to discover whether the love of God in Christ Jesus have really taken deep and permanent root there: that it does not dwell there in any rich abundance, is greatly to be feared; that it is there at all, if there be no compunction, no sorrow for the little you have done, or are able to do, or are striving to do, to promote it in those so near to you, is well worthy of your inquiry. We would not say, because we do not think, that in all such cases of culpable supineness, the love of God in Christ Jesus does not exist in the heart; but must it not, indeed, be a most tender plant, a most weak and flickering flame, a most uninfluential principle, if it can be content to carry but one soul to heaven, to add but one jewel to the Saviour's crown! God grant that the woe of the unprofitable servant may never be our own—"Take the talent from

him, and give it unto him that hath ten talents, for unto every one that hath," and employs it in his Master's service, "shall be given, but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

At the end of three or four years, which were spent by Saul at Tarsus, Barnabas, who appears from his first acquaintance with him at Jerusalem, to have conceived a very great and permanent affection for Saul, departed, as we are told, to seek him,[1] and having found him at Tarsus, carried him with him to Antioch, where he had himself before been the instrument of great and extensive usefulness. How disinterested an act was this on the part of Barnabas! By his preaching, "much people at Antioch had been added to the Lord:" that he was not insensible to the delight of being so employed is obvious, for we are expressly told, that when he "had seen the grace of God" manifested in the conversion of sinners, he "was

[1] Acts xi. 25.

glad;" and yet one of the very first acts of this successful preacher, was to seek Saul, and to bring him from Tarsus; to place him in the midst of the vineyard, where he had himself broken up the fallow ground, and then meekly and contentedly to take the second place, as we find throughout the whole history, he afterwards invariably does, and appear sufficiently rewarded by attending upon that chosen instrument of divine power, the man whom the Lord delighted to honour. Most rare achievement of the grace of God, when it so completely triumphs over self-love, and self-aggrandisement, and self-applause, as to make this the language of our hearts: 'Let but my God be glorified, let my Redeemer conquer, and while other and more honoured instruments may fight under His banners, and advance His glories, and partake of the spoils of His victories, I am well content to be overlooked and forgotten;' "less than the least of all

saints," "a door-keeper in the house of my God."

At Antioch, Saul and Barnabas remained, we are informed, for a whole year, "assembling themselves with the church, and teaching much people;" making only one short visit to Jerusalem, to carry relief to the brethren during a time of famine, and bringing back with them for their assistant, John, whose surname was Mark.

Of these facts nothing but a very brief and scanty notice is vouchsafed us in holy writ; nor are any particulars of the subject of our present history recorded, until we are told, at the opening of the thirteenth chapter, that by the directions of the Holy Ghost, Saul and Barnabas were commanded to be separated from the other disciples, and to be sent forth to carry the glad tidings of salvation to the heathen world.

We now commence the history of the missionary life of Saul, a course adorned

by more labours, and enriched by more sufferings, than the life of any other individual of whom mankind have ever read. The first important incident in this career of usefulness, was the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the Roman deputy of the island of Cyprus.

The event is thus described by the evangelist: "Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, called for Barnabus and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God." This was the first of the idolatrous Gentiles, a Roman magistrate, a man of high rank and important office, to whom the gospel had been openly proposed. He is described by the Spirit of God as "a prudent man," and the evidence to this is his "desiring to hear the word of God." How remarkably does the application of terms by the mouth of the Spirit of God, differ from their application by the mouth of the world! If we can conceive an instance of what the world would term the height of imprudence, we have it here.

A Roman governor of high rank, condescending to send for the teachers of a new religion, for men who were preaching certain doctrines promulged by one Jesus, who had suffered as a criminal under the Roman governor of Judea, and desiring to hear from them the word of God! The strong probability that if he received it, he would lose not only his office, but his life; the certainty that if he even rejected it, he would seriously injure his character among his Gentile friends by the inquiry, would have been quite sufficient to have stigmatized him in the eyes of the world as a most imprudent and injudicious man. Yet the Spirit of God has declared this man to be a "prudent man." And surely, my brethren, if there be meaning in words, the term is most appropriately applied: for can there be a better evidence of prudence, than, passing onward, as we know ourselves to be, to a state of boundless existence beyond the grave, seriously to inquire, whether the faith

which we profess, the religion to which we belong, be indeed the word of God, and sufficient to carry us safely into the eternal mansions? Would to God that every great man, and every rich man, and every powerful man, every governor, and every magistrate throughout the British empire, would evince the same measure of wisdom as this Roman proconsul—would at least devote as much attention, and occupy themselves as earnestly, in inquiring into the eternal truths of the word of God, as they do to make themselves masters of the most common topics of worldly knowledge, or the most unimportant matters of daily conversation. Yet in the eyes of the world, an earnest desire after religious knowledge is the only weakness, and the only folly; and in the language of the world they who neglect it are the truly prudent men, the judicious men, the wise men; yes, in their generation, far wiser than the children of light. Alas! how fearfully in

the great day of account will the Holy Spirit of God vindicate his use of the term, when all other wisdom shall be proved to have been folly, and all other prudence insanity, except that which leads its professors to seek diligently for the pearl of great price, and when they have found it, to sell all that they have to purchase it.

The rich and the great, however, do not only possess the same internal disinclination to an earnest search after divine truth, which we all possess, they have usually far greater external hindrances. So it was with the Roman governor of whom we are speaking. When the apostles, at his desire, came to him to expound the word of God, they found with him "a certain sorcerer, a false prophet," "who withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith."

This has ever been one of the snares and hindrances of the great—the class of people by which they are usually surrounded. If there even be, as thanks be

to God, there often is, a willingness to inquire after the truths of the gospel among the rich and the noble of the world, they are so hedged in by those whose interest or whose ignorance strongly influence them in "turning away" their patrons from the faith, that we scarcely need the authority of our divine Lord to assure us, that with so much opposition from without, and so much indifference within, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

This opposition, however, is not confined to the associates or the followers of the wealthy; and, therefore, it is not in their path alone that this stumbling-block is laid. Wherever the gospel is preached in all its fulness and freeness, there will too often be awakened the bitterness of hostility and hatred; wherever the Spirit of God is present to open the eyes of men, there the spirit of darkness will be

present to close them. This is Satan's unceasing business, to "turn" our hearers "from the truth;" at one time he will carry his purpose into effect by implanting prejudice against the doctrine, at another by instilling hatred against the teacher. We cannot preach the truth in sincerity, you cannot embrace it, without most certainly, sooner or later, feeling the envenomed shafts of malice and calumny; these are reserved almost exclusively for the preachers and the followers of the true gospel. A man may preach anything else with impunity; he may uphold morality to the exclusion of spiritual religion; he may altogether omit, or slightly gloss over, every leading doctrine of Christ; he may even leave the very divinity of our blessed Lord rather to be gathered from what he has left unsaid, than to be seen in what he has plainly advanced, and yet you shall not usually find that man opposed. But let a preacher endeavour to display the blessed

gospel in its fulness—let him dwell upon the sinfulness and corruption of our nature, upon justification by faith in a crucified Redeemer alone, the necessity of a renewed heart, and of a separation from the sinful pleasures of the world—and let him do this even with every degree of caution, and tenderness, and anxiety, not to wound the feelings of any individual, and yet that man shall not escape the tongue of slander, or the finger of scorn. This, my brethren, is a part of the offence of the cross, we bear it in common with every apostle and prophet, and with our divine and blessed Master himself; we may not hope, we ought not to desire, that "the disciple should be above his master, the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple to be as his master, the servant as his lord."

In the case before us, no sooner had Elymas withstood the preaching of the apostles, than we are told, "Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?"

This, we may rest assured, is not one of those passages of Scripture which are written for our imitation, since nothing but the supernatural discernment and divine commission of the apostles would at all justify us in so speaking of any of the children of men. It is, however, equally certain, that in the instance we are considering, the apostle did not speak from the hasty or irritated feelings of the natural heart, but by direct inspiration; for we are particularly told, and no doubt for the express purpose of evincing the spirit by which he was influenced, that at the moment he so spake "he was filled with the Holy Ghost." Be assured, therefore, that although "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," never are such strong expressions of indignation authorized in holy writ as when applied

to those who would prevent the progress of the Gospel, or cast a stumbling-block in the way of any who are seeking an interest in its great and blessed truths. In reference to all such, our Lord has said, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." The apostle's reproof, however, strong and powerful as it was, did not stand alone; it was accompanied by an immediate and awful display of divine vengeance. "Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee," he continued, "and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and darkness, and he went about seeking some one to lead him by the hand." How remarkable and how retributive a sentence! Elymas had willingly closed the eyes of his mind against the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and now the Almighty closed his bodily

eyes against the light of the sun of nature. He had endeavoured to turn the proconsul from the truth, and to lead him into error, and now he is himself rendered so helpless and dependant, that he gladly seeks some one to lead him by the hand. If there be a crime which even at the present day usually brings with it its appropriate punishment, it is most assuredly the crime of subverting, or endeavouring to subvert, of restraining, or striving to restrain, the work of divine grace in the hearts of those around us. Do you ever, for instance, behold persons anxiously solicitous, lest those over whom they possess control, should be guilty of the only unpardonable sin in the eyes of the world, the sin of being "righteous overmuch?" carefully guarding them, perhaps, from "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," but far more carefully guarding them, from "the right ways of the Lord?" always fearing lest the love of God, and the fear of God, should take

too complete possession of their hearts, lest they should live too much for the coming eternity, too little for the passing day? then mark the effect of such attempts upon the minds of those who make them. You will almost invariably find that they recoil in fearful judgments on themselves; that like Elymas, while endeavouring to keep others from the light, they are themselves visited with judicial and tenfold darkness; while, unlike Elymas, they alone are unconscious of their calamity, and too often will neither seek nor accept a guide, until all guidance and all warnings come too late to rescue them from their inevitable fate. If I had reason to fear that I addressed any such in this congregation, how earnestly should I entreat, how affectionately should I implore you to have compassion, not on those whom you would mislead, not on those whom you would coerce, but on your own undying souls. What account will you render at the great day, how will you appear before your God,

how will you answer to your Judge, when you hear his awful voice—"Ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in, ye hindered?" In the instance before us, however, mercy most compassionately sweetened justice; great as was the crime, the punishment was but for "a season," that there might be still room for penitence and pardon; marking most plainly that even of the worst of men there is hope, at least sufficient to authorize our exertions and to aid our prayers.

The effect of this miracle is thus recorded by the evangelist: "And the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

Such was the blessed result of the honest, unprejudiced inquiry of this "prudent man." Had he listened to the dictates of worldly policy, had he attended to the advice of worldly counsellors, he certainly never would have arrived at this most merciful conclusion;

but determining, through the grace of God, to hear and to inquire for himself, he was brought, in humility, and faith, and obedience, to Him, "whom truly to know is everlasting life."

My brethren, if I address, at the present moment, any of you who have been educated in prejudices against a scriptural view of divine truth, who are surrounded by those who, from whatever motive, are anxious to keep you back from receiving it, in all its powerful and influential realities, who would infinitely rather that you should be vain, and trifling, and worldly, if you may but be an accomplished follower in the train of this world's folly, than that you should faithfully and fearlessly take up the cross, and deny yourself, and follow Christ, — to you does the example before us speak most solemnly, and at the same time most encouragingly.

It speaks most solemnly, in urging you to seize the present moment, to venture

upon no delay, but while the Spirit of God is willing to strive with you, to yield to his entreaties; to search the word of God in humility and sincerity for yourself, and to see, with the Bereans of old, "whether these things be so." Remember, Felix only delayed his search till a more "convenient season," and was lost; Sergius Paulus inquired honestly and faithfully, without the delay of a moment, and was saved. Do not, therefore, deceive yourself by the vain and common subterfuge—it is impossible, under my present circumstances, with my present hindrances, to take any decided thought upon serious religion, to make any important change in my manner of life and conversation. Be assured that this is merely self-deception; there are no circumstances, there are no hindrances, which can fall to the lot of any human being, that can justify such a conclusion. Can you be placed in a more difficult situation, in a more responsible office, in

a more dangerous rank, than Sergius Paulus, sitting as a Gentile magistrate upon a heathen tribunal, and yet becoming the first Christian convert? And how was this effected? "Not by power, not by might, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." God's grace was sufficient for him. Here, then, his example speaks most encouragingly to you. The same grace is still as freely offered and as abundantly sufficient. Every step you take towards an increased decision of conduct, every effort you make towards greater spirituality of heart and mind, will be less difficult and more gratifying than the last; until at length, when wholly conquered by the love of God in Christ Jesus, and "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," you will be constrained to acknowledge, O blessed Redeemer, "Thy yoke indeed is easy, and Thy burden is light;" Thy "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all Thy paths are peace."

LECTURE VI.

ACTS XIII. 39.

"BY HIM, ALL THAT BELIEVE, ARE JUSTIFIED FROM ALL THINGS."

THE conversion of Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul, which occupied a prominent station in our last lecture, was an important event at the early period of the church of Christ in which it occurred; and the memory of it was perpetuated in a remarkable manner as regards the subject of our present history.

The evangelist says, "Then Saul, who is also called Paul;" previously to this incident he is never called by any other name than Saul in Holy Writ, and after it, that name is never mentioned, the ap-

pellation of Paul having been bestowed upon him, as is supposed by the best commentators, after Sergius Paulus, as a lasting memorial of the conquest which his divine Master had thus achieved by his instrumentality. Surely, if the heroes of Pagan antiquity obtained their titles by their sword, and derived them, as it is well known they frequently did, from the names of the countries which they conquered, well might Saul thus receive the name of the first Gentile idolater who had ever been subdued by the sword of the Spirit, the doctrines of the cross. A name so acquired will be recognised, and honoured, and rejoiced in, when every other title of distinction has been long forgotten; while the true and humble follower of the Lord Jesus Christ will even now confess, I had rather be the honoured instrument of converting one immortal soul to the knowledge of the Redeemer, of plucking one brand from the everlasting burning,

than inherit the titles, or acquire the fame, of all the conquerors of the world.

Barnabas and Paul having left Cyprus, came, we are told, to Perga in Pamphylia, where the following incident is thus briefly related:—"John departing from them, returned to Jerusalem." This was John Mark, of whom we are told, in the former part of the chapter, that "they had John to their minister." The motive for his sudden departure is not alluded to in holy writ, neither is any sentence passed upon it; but in a subsequent passage of the history, we shall find that it was deeply resented by St. Paul, and laid the foundation of a serious difference between him and Barnabas. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God," said our divine Master.

Brethren, before you enter upon a religious course, before you take up the cross and follow Christ, "sit down first and count the cost." Are you content to re-

sign your own will and your own pleasure, to the pleasure and the will of the Most High, and to say, "Other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us, but by Thee only will we" now "make mention of Thy name?" to think nothing hard which God commands, nothing painful which God inflicts, nothing too great a sacrifice which his honour and his glory require at your hands? Are you "able to drink of the cup which your Lord drank of, and to be baptized with the baptism which he was baptized with?" If you reply, with James and John of old, in the deepest feeling of your own weakness, and yet in all humble reliance upon divine grace, "We are able;" then do we rejoice to "bid you God speed;" then say we to you, in the name of the living God, and in union with the living Saviour, and under the protection of the living Spirit, Go forth, "conquering and to conquer." You have, by divine grace, "chosen that good part which shall not

be taken away" from you, and on that day when, as we are told in the Revelation, "The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the mighty men, shall hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and shall say, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;" you shall, indeed, rejoice that you have now been counted worthy to suffer shame, and toil, and reproach, for His name's sake.

That John departed from Paul and Barnabas in the midst of their labours, "and went not with them to the work," is afterwards declared by St. Paul himself. But there is a circumstance which we gather from a former chapter,[1] which cannot but tend to diminish, at least in some degree, the culpability of this desertion. While Paul and Barnabas, so far as appears from holy writ, had no earthly ties

[1] Acts xii. 12.

to entangle them in running the race set before them, we find that John Mark had a *mother* living at Jerusalem; an aged, and, as it appears, a pious and a widowed mother; for it was in her house that the disciples were gathered together in prayer for Peter, on that night when the angel of the Lord struck off his chains, and delivered him from his captivity. It was, then, to return to Jerusalem, where this pious parent dwelt, that John Mark thus abruptly forsook the scene of his labours. That he should have remembered the claims which such a parent had upon him before he embarked in the great cause of evangelizing the Heathen, is true; that he who "loves father or mother more than Christ, is not worthy of Him," is equally certain; but whatever be the verdict which many may pass upon him who thus deserted for a season the work in which he was engaged, from the weakness of filial affection, and the love of a tender and perhaps declining parent, we cannot

speak harshly of an act where such may have been the motive; and surely he will not judge harshly of it, who, amid the agonies of the cross, looked down upon her who had given him birth, and provided for the remaining years of her imbittered pilgrimage, a solace and a home.

However valuable, my younger brethren, may be, as unquestionably they are, the more active and ostensible duties of the Christian, be assured that the domestic and relative duties are not less pleasing, not less acceptable in the sight of your heavenly Father; that they must always hold pre-eminently the first place in the ordinary range of Christian requirements; and that while you are watching the sick bed of a suffering parent, or endeavouring to sweeten the declining years of some affectionate relative by your presence, to enliven the closing evening of life's little day by your tender assiduities, and your thoughtful and considerate attentions, you are pleasing God,

and serving God, and promoting the honour and glory of God, in a manner which shall not be forgotten by Him here, or hereafter.

Barnabas and Paul, after John had left them, departed from Perga, and came to Antioch in Pisidia, a very different place, and far distant from the Antioch in Syria, so frequently mentioned in the history we are pursuing; while there, they entered, on the Sabbath-day, the Jewish synagogue, and sat down among the worshippers. After the service of the day was concluded, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." Then Paul stood up, and addressed the assembled worshippers at considerable length; first dwelling upon that subject, always so peculiarly grateful to Jewish ears, the abundant mercies of God towards their nation; the manner in which the Almighty had chosen their forefathers, and

exalted their seed to an eminent station among the kingdoms of the earth; then the remarkable promises which he had committed to them, of the Messiah, which had been so wonderfully and mercifully realized in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. This affecting address was concluded by St. Paul with this most blessed declaration: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things."

Upon this discourse of the apostle, which was probably very much the same as all that he delivered; since of the many which he preached during his missionary journey, the Holy Ghost has bequeathed this alone to the Church of God; it must be permitted us to dwell during the remainder of the present Lecture, for the truth involved in it is of such unspeakable importance, that it cannot be brought too closely to our hearts.

When, my Christian brethren, we, the ministers of Christ, anxiously desire to know in what manner we should, at the present hour, address ourselves to the hearts and consciences of sinners, we refer to our divine Master, and find his unchangeable command, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name." When we feel some doubts as to the extent of this commission, and the method in which it should be fulfilled, we look at the manner in which St. Paul understood and obeyed it: "Men and brethren, be it known unto you, that by Him, even by the Lord Jesus Christ, all that believe, are justified from all things." We are, therefore, taught, both by precept and example, to bring these good tidings in all their blessed simplicity, and in all their abundant consolation, to the ear, and, if the will of God be so, to the heart of our hearers.

At the present hour, then, all which we can call our own, we offer them thus

freely, thus unreservedly to you, to all of you indiscriminately, to each of you, of whatever rank, or of whatever age; for at the present day, when so many make a profession of religion, and so few comparatively appear to have ever been humbled, self-abased, broken-hearted under the conviction of sin, this inquiry is a peculiarly important one, Have you ever really felt and acknowledged yourself to be a *sinner* in the sight of God? Do you, upon looking back to the past year, the past week, the past day, see many acts of omission and commission, against which the anger of an offended and neglected God is justly pointed? are you deeply penitent for these things, do they press heavily upon your conscience, do you with a contrite and broken heart really bewail them, not merely in the formal acknowledgment of a public confession, but secretly and in private? You have shed many tears for your sufferings, have you ever shed one for your sins? Your troubles and disap-

pointments have cost you many a weary hour, and perhaps many a sleepless night —are your sins and transgressions the only things that are not burdensome? or are you among the blessed number of those whom the Spirit of God has taught to hate sin, all sin, even the least sin, with a holy and inextinguishable hatred of those to whom He has given that true repentance which can only flow from him, and which your Saviour was exalted especially to bestow? and do you sometimes think, if I could but feel assured of the pardon of my sins, I could bear my sorrows, my troubles, my anxieties, without repining? Then "to you are the words of this salvation sent;" we say to you, as St. Paul said to his hearers, "Men and brethren, be it known unto you, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things." If you have come this day to the house of God, not to while away a vacant hour, not to gratify a vain

curiosity, but to find pardon for your sins, peace for your conscience, and grace for your soul, you may, blessed be God! obtain it here.

However you may have hitherto been in ignorance that such a blessing was ever vouchsafed here on earth; and, therefore, however little you may have expected to be in the full possession and enjoyment of it, at this day, this very hour, it may become your own. If you now apply to the cleansing blood of Christ; if you now close with the gracious offers of a Saviour, hearing with the understanding ear, and the heart which God has opened, when we say, "We beseech you be ye reconciled to God;" really believing that the Lord Jesus Christ is both able and willing to cleanse you from your sins, to clothe you in His righteousness, to guide you by His Spirit, and afterwards to receive you into glory; and giving yourself up freely and unreservedly to be governed by Him, as well as to be saved

by Him, to be one of his obedient, as well as his believing people, we scruple not to apply to you the words of the text, and to say, that you who thus believe "are justified from all things;" you stand now, from this moment, acquitted before God; every sin which has hitherto sullied your conscience, and distressed your mind, and grieved the Holy Spirit of God, if indeed, deeply repented of, and brought to the blood of sprinkling, is pardoned, cast into the depths of the sea, whence it shall never again rise to shame, or to condemn you. Blessed, blessed promise, yet not too good, not too great, to be strictly and undeniably true! For it is no future privilege, no uncertain happiness, no limited salvation, of which the apostle speaks; "All that believe," he says, "are justified from all things:" not future, or he would have said, "*shall* be justified;" not uncertain, or he would have said, "*may* be justified;" not limited, or he would have said, "justified from *some* things:"

but, blessed be God, present, and certain, and unlimited: "ARE justified from ALL things," are acquitted, are more than acquitted, are considered holy through the righteousness of Christ, are abundantly pardoned and received into God's love, and shall be abundantly blessed, and received into God's glory. And this, my brethren, not a privilege confined to the advanced Christian, the experienced believer, but freely offered to the feeblest disciple, the weakest child in the Lord's spiritual family; for it is to such that the beloved apostle spake, when he said, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins ARE FORGIVEN you for His name's sake."

Be not, then, afraid to believe what an apostle was not afraid to preach, what the Holy Spirit was not afraid to inspire. Be assured, that it is a doctrine according to godliness, however strange it may sound to the natural man, however doubtful it may appear to the natural heart. It is a

doctrine which, until you receive it in the love of it, you will be excluded, because you will exclude yourself, from much of the comfort, much of "the joy and peace in believing." Once learn thus to see God as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus; to see him as accepting your persons, pardoning your sins, loving your souls, and a life of holy and devoted obedience will assuredly follow. For who ever work so hard as those who work for love? Of all the disciples, who is he who alone has left upon record his positive conviction, that the commandments of God are not, cannot be, "grievous?"[1] Could you not discover, even if it were left untold, that it must be he whom, of all the twelve, Jesus loved the most, he who lay upon his breast, and possessed the largest portion of the heart which dwelt within it? "Talk of morality! Thou bleeding Lamb, the true morality is love to Thee," because it is the root, the

[1] 1 John v. 3.

well-spring, the motive of every Christian virtue, of every acceptable deed of Christian morality and obedience.

There is, however, in conclusion, a parting word in the apostle's sermon to another and a different class of hearers; for having proclaimed the gracious and unrestricted offers of pardon, upon which we have been speaking, he thus concludes, "Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the Prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish." Could such an address as this have been necessary? could the apostle have had among his hearers any who were the despisers of so high a privilege, of so unspeakable a blessing?

Yes, my brethren, for we are told in a very few verses after, that these very people who had been present at the discourse upon which we have been commenting, "spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming."

No doubt, as the apostle's eye glanced over that large assembly, while he beheld many who were drinking deeply of the water of life, and receiving it as the very life of their souls, he beheld many also whose evident impatience and indifference, some, perhaps, whose avowed dislike and hostility, were legibly impressed upon their countenances, and to them he boldly and unhesitatingly addressed himself, when he said, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish."

But can such an appeal ever be necessary now? ought such an appeal ever to be made, in a professedly Christian congregation?

My brethren, we fear that it is necessary, we believe that it ought. For that which took place eighteen hundred years ago, will assuredly take place to-day; never have the same truths been preached before a general congregation, never shall they be so preached, as long as the heart of man is what the sin of Adam made it,

without producing similar results. Some will "wonder and believe," and some will "wonder and perish."

Are there none among you, for instance, who while we have been speaking of the freeness of the Christian's pardon, its present certainty and comfort, while, in fact, we have merely enlarged upon the apostle's words, have felt disposed to "contradict the things which were spoken by Paul," and have thought this an unsafe, or an unsound, or an unscriptural doctrine? Are there none of you, who, if you have not inwardly denied the truth and the reality of what the apostle has propounded, have, at least for the present, passed it by, and rejected it, as a matter which will do for future consideration, instead of earnestly and anxiously embracing it to-day? If there be, we say to one and to all such, as the apostle said to his hearers, "Beware!" remember that the revealed word of God is not to be trifled with; that to reject is to despise,

and that to despise is to perish! There is no medium, there can be none, between a cordial, a heart-renewing, life-influencing reception of divine truth, and a despising, condemning neglect of it. On the great day of account, the generations of men can form but two companies, they who have believed in "the only name given under heaven, whereby we must be saved," and shall enter into rest; and they who have rejected that name, despised those offers, and shall eternally perish. These, and these alone, are the two innumerable companies, in one or other of which, you, and I, and all must take our stand; at that awful day, when "the great white throne" shall descend, and heaven and earth shall pass away, one solemn question will decide our fate, our station, our eternity, Whom did you love and serve on earth? That Being, whether it be God or Satan, will be your master then, he will be your companion, the author of your joy, or the co-partner

of your sufferings for ever and for ever. "What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of Christ?" "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

There is no feeling so deeply affecting to the heart of a Christian minister, as the apprehension lest any, to whom he has been the appointed messenger to convey the bread of life, should eventually perish. To think that any who have heard the offers of the Gospel, or sat within the walls of our temples, and joined in our services, should not sit down hereafter in the kingdom of God:—to think that while the children of God shall have entered in with the bridegroom to the wedding, you—yes, if it be but one among you—should be shut out:—you to whom the same Gospel has been preached, the same Saviour freely offered, the same Spirit waiting to be gracious:—you, who have uttered, at least with the lips, the same prayers and praises as the people

of God—that after such privileges and such opportunities, you should ever dwell "amidst everlasting burnings;" that you should exchange the hosannas and hallelujahs of angels, for the repinings and curses of condemned spirits! Even the thought is too dreadful to entertain for a moment; O what must be the tremendous, the indescribable reality? How invaluable, then, is the truth, that "through this man," even Christ Jesus our Lord, is still at this hour "preached to you the remission of sins." Come to Him now, in penitence and faith, and all will be pardoned, all will be blotted out, all will be forgiven: "Behold, he stands at the door and knocks;" suffer this day, this hour, this warning, to pass unheeded by, and He may have departed from you for ever.

LECTURE VII.

ACTS XIII. 43.

"CONTINUE IN THE GRACE OF GOD."

AT the close of that most instructive discourse of St. Paul, with which our last Lecture concluded, we are told that the Jews withdrew from the synagogue. They had in the first instance offered the apostle permission to address the assembled worshippers; but when they found the heart-searching nature of his discourse, the bold and uncompromising manner in which he advanced the truths of the gospel; and when they had heard that awful threatening, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!" with which he closed his address, they with-

drew discontented and disgusted from the synagogue. The Gentiles, on the contrary, "besought that these words," yes, that these very words, which the Jews despised, "might be preached to them the next sabbath." The marginal reading is, might be preached to them "in the week between," which translation agrees better with the original, and probably alluded to the two weekly services which were usual among the Jews, on Tuesdays and Thursdays,—on which days the law was read and expounded to them in the synagogues, agreeably to an order of Ezra, that they should never be more than three days without the law. In the present congregation, and after the manner in which this weekly service has now for some years past been uniformly attended, I need not dwell upon the importance of this regulation: at the same time, I shall, I am convinced, need no apology for thus reminding you, that religion is a very tender

plant; that it requires, while in its present ungenial climate and unfavourable soil, all the aids which you can gather round it; that if you permit it to remain from sabbath to sabbath, unnurtured by the divine Spirit, it is not the deepest attention to its interests on one day in seven, that will ensure its growth and its prosperity. You must be often, very often tending it; continually approaching a throne of grace, to draw from thence the fertilizing influences to which I have alluded; continually seeking the living streams which flow through the word of inspiration, "with joy drawing water out of the wells of salvation." So doing, we would unite our fervent prayers to yours, that the seed which is now sowing, even though it should be at present "less than all the seeds in the earth," "should spring and grow up, man knoweth not how, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," bringing forth fruit an hundred fold to the glory of God.

"Now when the congregation was broken up," continues the historian, "many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." Thus indefatigable were these holy men in their Master's service. Their labours were not confined to the temple, or the temple worship; but when those whom they had been the means of converting to the faith of the Saviour whom they preached, came to them, they added private persuasion to public teaching.

Would that it were more the custom in these our days, for those who have been impressed by the public ministry, or have been led, by what they have there heard, to inquire further into these great and important subjects, to go at once to their ministers: how many doubts might be removed, how many mistakes corrected, how many impressions corroborated, how much of zeal, comfort, and strength, im-

parted to the first weak, and tottering steps in the Christian life, if there were, as there most obviously ought to be, this free communication between every Christian minister and his people!

The apostle had before urged these Gentile proselytes, of whom we have been speaking, to receive the glad tidings of salvation; they now persuaded them to continue in them.

Thus also, my brethren, would we address ourselves to you. If you have been led by the Spirit of God, to see that there is more of importance, more of reality in religion than you had heretofore imagined, and if the effect of this have been, that you have sincerely and fervently sought the favour of God through the blood of Jesus Christ, "the new and living way," we would now, like the apostles in the text, employ our most earnest exhortation in persuading you to "*continue* in the grace of God." The first step in religion is, doubtless,

the most difficult; the first turning of the heart, by the power of the divine Spirit, from the idols of the world to serve the only true God, is the most arduous. But then there is, accompanying this first step, all the delight of novelty, all the fervour of excitement, which many, too many, alas! daily mistake for the operation of the Spirit of God. It is when, to speak in the words of Scripture, "the first love" begins to cool, when the ardour with which you had entered on the heavenward path begins to abate, that your spiritual enemy, ever on the watch, urges his attack with the most persevering, and the most successful hostility. You are tempted to doubt whether you had not, during the earlier days of conversion, taken too strict a view of the commands of God and the requirements of his gospel. When you see those around you, and those not merely the irreligious and profane, but the outwardly regular and attentive to

religious duties, apparently dividing their time and their affections, with so much complacency, between God and the world, you begin to hesitate as to the real necessity, with Caleb of old, of "following the Lord fully," of choosing God, and God alone, for your portion. You begin to think, Can it be possible that so large a portion of the world should be in the wrong upon this vital point? Is it not far more probable that I, and the few who think with me, should be mistaken, and that the Gospel does not really require that entire devotedness of heart and life which I have been led to imagine? It is thus that your spiritual enemy will engender doubts at the very moment when, from abating zeal and flagging love, you are the least able to meet and to overcome them. Few who ever think for themselves, have escaped such doubts and such misgivings as these. Be assured, that they have been felt by every true servant of the Lord Jesus, at some period

or other of his spiritual course, as strongly as they are now experienced by you. When, for instance, Noah, the first "preacher of righteousness," was employed, day by day, for an hundred years, in acting faith upon a single promise of God, by building the ark that was to carry him and his family in safety upon those waters which were to drown the world, can you conceive anything so hopeless, so futile as his occupation must have appeared to all around him? Can you imagine anything more trying than this must have been, in moments of spiritual weakness and temptation, to his own faith? How often must the beguiling thought have occurred to his mind, Can I alone really be right, and all around me wrong? Have I not mistaken the command of my God, or understood it too literally? Is it probable, is it possible, is it consistent with His mercy and love, that the thousands and tens of thousands in the world should be hurrying to

perdition, and that I, a poor sinner like the rest, and my little family, should alone be secured? How often must Satan have urged him, by such reasonings as these, to cast aside his tools, to give up his constant and self-denying labours, and to enjoy himself freely and thoughtlessly like the ungodly race around him! So will it often be with you, my brethren; the eye of sense, and the eye of faith, will see things under very different aspects; your spiritual enemy will often strife to convince you that you are unnecessarily strict, and needlessly precise; that you understand literally what was intended only to be expressed hyperbolically, that many portions of God's commands were addressed to the Gentile world, and were never intended to bind, and control, and regulate the Christian. We urge you, as you value your immortal souls, as you love the Saviour who died for you, to listen, not to my voice, not to the voice of the apostle in the text, but to the voice

of our most gracious Redeemer himself; He it was who left it as one of His last injunctions to His apostles, "Continue ye in my love." Think of those by whom this blessed injunction has been disregarded, of those whose religious profession has passed away as the morning cloud and as the early dew, and think of the awful sentence which the Spirit of God has himself recorded against them: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance."

But while we thus urge you to the performance of this high duty, we would urge you, with equal earnestness, not to attempt to address yourself to its fulfilment in your own strength; blessed be God, He has undertaken for you, and His grace is sufficient for you. With the duty

He has most mercifully bound up an accompanying and unfailing promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" you may, therefore, be confident of this very thing, that "He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Continue in watching, continue in praying, continue in striving, and the word of God and the blood of Jesus are pledged to you that you shall "continue in the grace of God," and "that neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The immediate effect of these public and private exhortations of the apostle during the week, was, that on the next Sabbath-day "almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw it, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken of Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Bar-

nabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

It was thus that the apostles added the boldness of the lion, to the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove. They first freely proposed the blessings of the gospel to every hearer, and to every heart; "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." When the offer was rejected, they boldly charge the rejection upon the stubbornness and the blindness of those who heard them,—"Seeing ye put it from you!" There is no reference to any decree of the Almighty which could exclude them from the proffered blessings; indeed, the very contrary is most obviously implied, or the charge could not be maintained that they had "put it from them;" it was their own prejudice, their own stub-

bornness, their own sin; as our Lord said unto Jerusalem, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" It is thus, also, that we, at the present moment, address our hearers; we come as the ministers of reconciliation, we bring you good tidings, we offer to you, to each and to every one among you, salvation through the blood of Jesus; urging you to pray for the grace of the divine Spirit to "incline your heart" to accept it, to make you a "willing people in the day of His power." If you put it from you, you judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life; i.e., you proclaim, by that act, that everlasting life is not for you, or you for it, and like the apostles of old, we must carry forward our offers to other hearers, and to other hearts.

"For so hath the Lord commanded us," continues St. Paul; while the proud, self-righteous Jews, put from them the

words of everlasting life, the poor, outcast Gentiles, received it to the saving of their souls. "And the word of the Lord," continues the historian, "was published throughout all the region." Such was the immediate and necessary effect of their belief, that they hastened to convey to the hearts of others those glad tidings which the Lord had carried to their own.

This is invariably the nature of a vital reception of the gospel of our Lord; it does not lie in the heart like a stone, dead and inoperative, but like a living plant spreads and multiplies, and cannot be restrained from spreading and multiplying; but it is for ever throwing its ramifications farther and wider, and extending its cheering blossoms, and carrying forth its life-giving fruits, wherever there is a human heart to be comforted, or a human being to profit by them.

Is this then, let me ask, my brethren, the effect which the gospel has had upon yourselves? Do you rejoice to publish

it to others? Do you esteem it one of your highest privileges to be permitted to carry its awakening declarations to the careless and the slumbering spirit, its healing remedies to the broken and the contrite heart?

Do not imagine that this is merely applicable to the appointed ministers of God; every individual who has heard the word of God in the love of it, is bound, I do not say to preach it, but to recommend and to impress it upon those around him. Observe how beautifully this is to be inferred from the words of our Lord himself in the Revelation, "The Spirit," the holy Spirit of God, "and the bride," the Church and her appointed ministers, "say, Come;" but is no one else represented as carrying forth the invitation? Yes, my brethren, you, each and all of you, are included; for our Lord thus continues, "And let him that HEARETH, say, Come." You do not fulfil your Lord's injunction, you do not evince your grati-

tude to Him who has called you, if you, who hear, are not willing, and anxious, and persevering, in inviting others.

If you reply that you have not the power to go forth among your neighbours, to carry to the poor man's home the blessings of which you are a partaker, we ask, do you employ the power, where you must be conscious that you do possess it, among your own dependents, and in your own house? Is the gospel ever heard within your walls, and do its words of mercy, through your instrumentality, ever rejoice the hearts of those who dwell with you? Brethren, you cannot really love and know the Saviour, without desiring and attempting to effect this. You cannot say, day after day, "Thy kingdom come," with any real longing for the fulfilment of the petition,—I might almost add, with any real feeling of sincerity,—unless you are striving, as well as praying, for so glorious a consummation.

No sooner did the effects of the zeal

of the new converts become manifest by the fruits of which we have been speaking, than the opposition of the enemies of the gospel was equally apparent, "They stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts."

As certainly as the desire to propagate the truths of the gospel accompanies their reception, so certainly does the desire to persecute accompany their rejection. And what were the instruments which Satan employed on this occasion for his detestable purpose? The chief men, and the honourable women, nay, more than this, the "devout women." How remarkable is this, and yet how continually do we behold it verified, that the persons most resolutely opposed to the real doctrines of the gospel are not to be found merely among the worldly, and the thoughtless, and the profane, but

among the externally religious and devout! among those who "have a name to live," who attend often the most scrupulously to the form, but are ignorant, fearfully ignorant, of the power of godliness. These are they who, imagining themselves to have attained to precisely the right view, and the right measure of religion, brand all who differ from them as ignorant, or enthusiastic, and would curtail the fair and beautiful proportions of the tree of life, and cast away every blossom, and lop off every branch, until they had reduced it to the poor, dry, stunted stem, which alone they are content to recognise as the living plant.

In the instance before us, so far as the silencing and banishing the apostles were concerned, the enemies of the truth triumphed; they succeeded in driving them "out of their coasts;" but the imperishable seed was sown, the work was begun; and as well may the proud voice of man be raised against the waters of the ocean,

"Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther," as the power of the oppressor be exerted against the advance of divine truth. Unequal is the warfare, inevitable the event, when the reptile wars against his Maker, when man dares to oppose his God.

The disciples, indeed, departed; but, according to our Lord's express direction, ere they left the city "they shook off the dust of their feet against them." On the last day *that dust will speak.* When the opposer's mouth is for ever silenced; when the gainsayer, who has ridiculed the word, and the ministers, and the people of our Lord, has not another argument, another sarcasm, another scoff to offer, that dust will speak! Yes, the dust shaken from the garment of those who carry forth the invitations of the Saviour, will most undeniably convince their opponents, that the messengers of the living God were once among them; that the gospel of God was brought into

their coasts, into their streets, into their houses, but was refused admittance into their hearts. "Even the very dust of your city," are our Lord's own words, "we do wipe off against you; notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city." "For he that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me."

The chapter thus concludes—"And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost." Blessed effect of the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ into the heart! Well did the apostle of whom we are speaking, declare, that "the kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

My Christian brethren, you who have "received with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls,"

do not rest satisfied with anything short of that heavenly joy which is freely offered to every believing soul. Much injury is done to religion, much discomfort falls to the lot of many of the people of God, because they stop short of that blessed portion of peace and joy, which even here, their gracious Redeemer is ready to bestow. From the time that you believe, you "are justified from all things," i. e. from all that is past; you have the divine Spirit with you for the present, the promise of his continuance for the future; why then are you not raised above yourselves with "the joy of the Holy Ghost;" enlarged towards your God, with "joy unspeakable, and full of glory?" What can happen to you, to diminish your peace, to disturb your consolation? Even your very worst enemies, your sins themselves, ought, so far from driving you away from God, only to bind you, in penitence and humility, the closer to Him; and, as to every thing else,

whether it come in the shape of trial, or trouble, or adversity, or affliction, however grievous for the present, it ought to bring, and by the grace of God, it will bring, an increase of happiness and of joy to you whose faith and love "are exercised thereby."

"Rejoice," therefore, "in the Lord, and again I say, Rejoice." Rejoice that He has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; that He has manifested Himself to you as He does not unto the world; that He has taken away your transgressions and cast them into the depths of the sea; rejoice, above all, that "the time is short," that "the fashion of this world passeth away," that "yet a little while, and He who shall come, will come, and will not tarry;" that all things are hastening forward to that blessed and glorious day when your Redeemer shall appear unto your complete salvation, when "the last storm shall blow on the Church, when the last dart shall be thrown

by the wicked one, and the last enemy be destroyed;"[1] when you shall be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall you ever be with the Lord;" and may the language of your hearts be, in the words of one of the most holy and devoted of our prelates, "Now, Lord, how willing am I to change time for eternity, the evils of earth for the joys of heaven, misery for happiness, a dying life for immortality. Even so, Lord Jesus, take what Thou hast bought; receive my soul to Thy mercy, and crown it with Thy glory."[2]

[1] Bean's Family Prayers.

[2] Bishop Hall's Works, fol. p. 385.

LECTURE VIII.

ACTS XIV. 4.

"BUT THE MULTITUDE OF THE CITY WAS DIVIDED; AND PART HELD WITH THE JEWS, AND PART WITH THE APOSTLES."

WE resume the history of St. Paul at that period, when having been driven from Antioch by the persecution which had arisen there, he, together with his beloved friend Barnabas, had arrived at Iconium. Here, according to their usual custom, they went first into the synagogue of the Jews, offering the blessed privileges of the gospel to that favoured people, and "so spake that a great multitude believed." No higher reward could have been sought by the apostles, no higher reward is de-

sired by the ministers of Christ, than this which was here granted to St. Paul and his companion—"so to speak, that a great multitude may believe." The orator of this world would experience but little satisfaction, unless it could be said that he "so spake, that a multitude" applauded; that an admiring audience hung upon his lips, astonished by his eloquence, and attracted by his powers; the minister of Christ, on the contrary, is anxious that instead of the power of eloquence and the charms of oratory, the power of divine truth and the charm of divine love may pervade every sentence which he delivers; that he may himself be overlooked and forgotten in the wondrous message of mercy and condescension which he brings: all that he asks of you, all that he desires of God, is, that by the power of the Holy Ghost, you may be led to yield yourselves willing captives, not to the strength of his arguments, but to the sweet attractions of his Master's love.

Persecution, as in former instances, soon followed the success of the apostle's word; "the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected towards the brethren," while the only result it appears to have produced upon the apostles, was, that they abode there the longer, and spake the more boldly in the name of the Lord. The greater the opposition which the spirit of darkness kindles against the gospel, the greater boldness does the Spirit of light throw into the hearts of its defenders. Never has the Church of Christ so flourished as when thus oppressed and crushed, and persecuted; never has that tender plant raised its head with such powerful and unbroken elasticity, as when trodden beneath the feet of its opponents.

The natural consequence of this was, as the apostle continues, "The multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles."

This has ever been, and, doubtless, will ever be, the effect of a faithful, uncompromising display of the word of truth: unless all who hear it are indifferent to its dictates, and deaf to its calls, to newness of heart and life; or unless, by the power of divine grace, all who hear it are convinced and converted, it cannot be otherwise. Until the gospel was introduced into Iconium, doubtless the city was perfectly quiet; and to the mere casual observer, its state was infinitely preferable, before the name of Christ was heard within its walls. But how did that deceitful calm appear to the heart-searching eye of God? He knew it not to be the repose of peace, but the apathy of death. He knew that the very division which worldly men might deplore, and ignorant men might misunderstand, was the natural effect of the sifting nature of the word of truth—dividing, it is true, but dividing only the wheat from the

chaff, the sheep from the goats, the people of the Most High from the deluded followers of their eternal enemy. This effect of the dissemination of divine truth, so continually apparent during the first ages of the gospel, is by no means infrequent at the present day, wherever it is plainly and faithfully promulgated. Our Lord has truly said, "Suppose ye that I am come to send peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother." If it be asked, Is this a state of things, which, as the ministers of peace, we could either recommend or rejoice in? we reply, far from it; happy indeed should we be to know that there was no division throughout the world, to be assured that all who heard

the joyful sounds of the gospel should come in as willing and contented captives under the sceptre of the Redeemer. But if we be asked, whether then it be not better to suffer the continuance, even of that hollow peace which the world bestows upon its votaries, than thus to break it up, and for ever, by the power of the divine word, and to carry differences and divisions into neighbourhoods and congregations, and even into the very hearts of apparently the most united families? we reply at once, unhesitatingly, and unequivocally, decidedly not. Better, infinitely better, that there be the widest separation, the most distinct division, that some at least may be rescued from the power of the enemy, and brought in by the divine Spirit as willing captives to our Lord, than that all should continue in the drowsy, death-like apathy to the things of God, and to the future welfare of their souls, which pervades the world.

Better, if it must be so, that the father[1] be separated from the son, and the daughter from the mother, than that father and son, mother and daughter, be consigned to the same deadly indifference here below, to the same eternal banishment from our God hereafter. But, my brethren, while we are thus pleading the cause of division, mark well the nature of the division for which we plead. It is not a factious or irreverent difference from all around you; it is not a division for the sake of singularity; it is not a division of ill temper and unkindness, treating all who differ from you, as if they were unworthy of your regards; but a division like that recommended by the prophet of old, "If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him;" a temporary division here, which will frequently, by the grace of God, prevent an eternal division hereafter. For how often has

[1] See Matt. x. 35, &c.

the example and the testimony of one member of a family, really in earnest in taking up the cross and following Christ through evil report and good report, been the blessed means of bringing a whole family to God; while, on the other hand, a timid, time-serving, compromising religion, while it dishonours God and injures your own soul, too often deceives those around you into a complacency in their present state of spiritual darkness, and, therefore, into the loss of their future and eternal happiness.

We are aware how liable these observations are to misconstruction and misapprehension; but we shelter ourselves behind the already quoted authority of our divine Master, who, although the Prince of Peace, was well content "not to send peace, but a sword," if it might, while severing men from their nearest relatives and dearest friends, sever them at the same time from their most engrossing

pleasures and their dearest lusts: for "better is it," in this sense also, "to enter into life maimed, than having two hands and two eyes to be cast into hell-fire."

The persecution of the apostles increasing, and their present work finished at Iconium, they fled to Lystra, and, says the evangelist, "there they preached the gospel." The storm of persecution, instead of destroying, only widening and extending the blessed effects of the gospel of peace, as the wildest wind which passes over the face of the country only carries forth the seeds of the field, to a happier soil, or a wider and more fertile resting-place.

It was while remaining at Lystra, that the following incident occurred, so demonstrative of the power and goodness of God, and of the humility and sincerity of the apostles. "There sat a certain man, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. The same heard Paul speak,

who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked."

"The same heard Paul speak:" this is probably mentioned for the purpose of manifesting the secondary means by which the poor object of the miracle had been made partaker of that faith, which the apostle recognised. He had heard St. Paul speak of the salvation of Jesus Christ, and had gladly received the truth into his heart. He therefore believed in that holy name, by the power of which alone St. Paul was enabled to perform the miraculous cure, and so believing by the Holy Ghost, "he had faith to be healed."

Behold, in the case before us, an affecting picture of our own state by nature. "Impotent, and a cripple from his mother's womb!" Who is there here present before God this day, who has not, in his own experience, realized the affecting picture?

But do I address any of you who, like the lame man of whom we speak, are even now equally helpless, as helpless in spiritual things, as much in darkness and in impotency as when you were born? who, in this sense, never yet have walked; who are unable, even now, to "run the way of God's commandments," and have never yet received, because you have never yet truly sought to receive, that aid from on high, which is equivalent to the command of the apostle, "Stand upright on thy feet."

We then would ask you, Are you one of the spiritually sick, who know your weakness, and desire the aid of the good Physician? Have you "faith to be healed?" Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength? Do you believe that He is not only able, but willing to heal your infirmities, to pardon your sins, to supply you with grace and strength for your future progress? If

you reply, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," and if this prayer spring from a sincere and contrite heart, we may say with confidence to you, as St. Peter said to Æneas, "The Lord Jesus maketh thee whole." Yes, from this very hour, from the time that you are thus made willing by the Holy Ghost, to close with the offers of your Redeemer, to give yourself up unreservedly to be cleansed by Him, taught by Him, ruled by Him, we say, the "power of the Lord is present to heal you:" and, like the cripple of whom we speak, you will be enabled in a spiritual sense, to stand upright on your feet, to obey, to love, and to follow Christ, and to go on your way rejoicing.

No sooner was the astonishing miracle of which we have been speaking, perfected, than we are told, "When the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to

us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people." So much more willingly is the world led by the power of Satan, than by the Spirit of God. In spite of all the miracles which the apostles wrought, how few, comparatively, of those who beheld them, believed in the divinity, and sought earnestly for an interest in the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whose power these wonders were effected. Yet is one miracle sufficient, fully sufficient, to induce them to believe at once in the divinity of Paul, and to endeavour to propitiate the favour of the poor, sinful instruments, through whom the Lord condescended to manifest His power. So much more easily is the greatest error in religion received and cherished than the most

simple truth; because the same spirit of darkness who bars the human heart against the entrance of all good, is unceasing in his efforts to open it to the reception of all evil.

The conduct of the apostles on this occasion, was well worthy of the faith which they professed: "they rent their clothes and ran in among the people, crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God which made heaven and earth;" "and with these sayings scarce restrained they the people that they had not done sacrifice unto them."

It is a happy thing for the ministers of Christ, when they seek not the praise of men, but can be contented with the glory which cometh from God only. The love of God is unchangeable, the love of man is more fickle than the winds of heaven. Woe be to us, if we

in any degree rely upon it; if we look to it as the end, the object, or the reward of our labours, we shall inevitably reap disappointment and distress, we shall lie down in sorrow. While do you, my brethren, keep your own hearts carefully and unremittingly, and pray that the Spirit of God may keep them, from the sin of these idolaters. Be jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy, that Almighty God may be robbed of no part or portion of the regards which are due to Him alone, by their stopping short in the mere human instruments whom He employs. Remember that your ministers are "men of like passions with yourselves:" flattery will make them vain, praise will make them conceited or self-sufficient; and the moment they become either vain, or conceited, or self-sufficient, be assured that God has done with them, their work is over; and, unless they return to Him in humbleness and brokenness of heart, He will

find other and more humble labourers for His vineyard, who shall render to Him the fruit, the whole fruit; for it is all His own, His right hand alone has nurtured it, and the dews of His good Spirit alone have brought it to perfection.

But the fickleness, as well as the emptiness and insufficiency of human applause, is well illustrated by the history before us. The same multitude who could be satisfied with nothing short of paying divine honours to St. Paul, and even worshipping him as a god, in a few short days treated him as the worst of malefactors; persecuted him, as they hoped and believed, even unto the death; "stoned him, and drew him out of the city, supposing him indeed to have been dead. Howbeit," continues the evangelist, "as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city." Thus realizing by his own repeated experience, the truth of the affecting description which he himself has bequeathed to us,

"We are troubled on every side, but not distressed; we are perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed."

In consequence of this violent attack, the apostles on the following day departed, carrying forth the gospel to other places and other hearers, and revisiting the cities where they had already planted it, "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God."

How essentially necessary was this labour of the apostles, we may in some degree imagine, from what is continually passing around us and within us. The word of God soon languishes, if it be not perpetually confirmed and strengthened by the external ordinances of divine grace and the internal work of the Spirit. And yet we should have thought it but a strange method of confirming the souls

of the disciples, by foretelling to them the certainty of their trials, and the abundant measure of their tribulations. In acting thus, however, St. Paul acted as his divine Master had done before him. He told the apostles of their approaching sufferings, that when they came to pass, they might remember that he had told them of them; that being forewarned, they might also be fore-armed.

It is thus, therefore, my beloved brethren, that we would speak to the youngest and weakest Christian among yourselves; it is a portion of our message, a portion which we may not suppress, that your way lies through much tribulation; many difficulties, many sorrows, many temptations await you, or rather await us all. "*We* must," says the evangelist, not *you* must; no, St. Paul, as well as his converts, ministers as well as hearers, all must pass by that way—there is no exception, no reserve. But we must not stop here, this also would only be a portion

of our message; the disciples declared the whole, for they said, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Mark well, therefore, the important conclusion; you shall not only pass into the tribulation, but out of it, through it, safely, happily, certainly through it, and arrive at last at the haven where you would be. The same word which predicts the struggle, blessed be God! predicts the triumph; the same word which makes it certain, that tribulations await you upon the journey, makes it equally certain, that "an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom and joy of your Lord" awaits you at the journey's end.

You will understand, then, how such a declaration was well calculated, not to alarm, but to confirm the souls of those who heard it. May God of His mercy grant that it may be blessed to the same most gracious end this day! May the fear of the coming trial be lost in the

hope of the approaching bliss! may every succeeding sorrow, and every succeeding tribulation, be only rendering you the more meet for the inheritance which awaits you, until the Lord of your salvation, having carried you in safety through every trial, shall bear you in His arms amidst the swellings of Jordan, above the deepest and the last, when "death shall be swallowed up in victory," and you shall be made "more than conquerors through Him that loved you!"

LECTURE IX.

ACTS XV. 39.

"AND THE CONTENTION WAS SO SHARP BETWEEN THEM, THAT THEY DEPARTED ASUNDER THE ONE FROM THE OTHER."

AFTER the labours and persecutions which formed a large portion of the history of St. Paul in the last lecture, we find him reposing for a considerable time among the Christians at Antioch. From this tranquilly-happy and useful state he was called by the following circumstance, peculiarly painful as the first dissension which disgraced the infant Church of the Redeemer, and remarkable as the first public exhibition among Christians, of that natural tendency of the human heart, which has continued to divide the

Church with greater or less success from that hour to the present.

We read at the commencement of the fifteenth chapter, that "certain men which came down from Jerusalem, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

These men were not Jews, as we might be led to imagine, but Jewish Christians; persons, who, although converted to the religion of Christ, had brought with them their early prejudices in favour of the ceremonial law, and were now anxious to bind it upon the new converts, as necessary to salvation. There was, no doubt, great plausibility in their arguments, and much weight they would naturally carry with them from the fact, that circumcision was of divine appointment, and could not be neglected with impunity under the old dispensation, and that no direct and positive abrogation of it had ever yet been announced under the new.

St. Paul discovered at once the incalculable danger which would accrue to the souls of the disciples, if this doctrine were tolerated, since whatever were thus put upon an equality with the one great sacrifice of our Lord, whether it were ceremonial or moral observances, would equally militate against the finished work of the Redeemer, and equally render the cross of Christ of none effect. We are told, therefore, that St. Paul "had no small dissension and disputation with them," but unable to bring them to reason, departed with Barnabas for Jerusalem, to lay the whole matter before the apostles.

This was the first general council of the Church; and happy would it have been for its peace, if all future councils had been conducted with the same truly Christian feeling and propriety. With the details of it, as forming rather a portion of church history than of the life of him of whom we are speaking, we are not at present concerned; the result,

however, is too important to be passed over in silence.

The whole body of the apostles agreed unanimously, that St. Paul should carry back to the disciples at Antioch the following decision: That the teachers of such opinions, by uniting ceremonial observances to the blood of Christ, as equally necessary to salvation, were "subverting the souls" of those who received them; that they, the apostles, had given no such commandment; that there were, indeed, some things from which the Gentile converts should abstain, because they were positive sins, as fornication: and others from which they should abstain for the sake of the prejudices of the Jewish Christians, as "from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled;" but that for any ceremonial observances to be pressed upon them as necessary to their salvation, was as contrary to the truth, as to the commands which the apostles had always given.

We mentioned at the commencement of this discourse, that the tendency of the human heart, from which this obnoxious heresy took its rise, had never ceased to foment disorder and division in the Church of Christ, from that hour to the present. It is true, that obedience to the ceremonial law has long since been given up; but has not a similar and equally dangerous mis-statement respecting the moral law, supplied its place? Have there not always been teachers in the Church, who have maintained, that moral duties, and moral observances, form the whole duty of man? that good works are as much the meritorious cause of salvation, as even the blood of Christ itself? This, then, is the old heresy of these judaizing teachers, under a new, but not very different aspect, flowing from the same tendency in the human mind, to unite something of its own, whether it be ceremonial or moral, to the perfect sacrifice, and finished work of the Redemer. Necessary,

absolutely necessary, as all good and holy works unquestionably are, as the fruits and evidences of your faith, the moment we speak of them as the meritorious cause of your acceptance, and that in this sense, as these judaizing teachers taught of circumcision, without it "ye cannot be saved," we are "counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing," and according to the apostolical decision, "subverting your souls." While, therefore, you are realizing every work of holiness and piety, and desiring to live in the habitual and consistent practice of them, be watchful over yourself with godly jealousy, that you do not look to them with any, the slightest, feeling of dependence, or of self-complacency: Christ must be your all in all, your "wisdom," your "righteousness," and your "sanctification," or He will never be your "redemption."

St. Paul having returned to Antioch, with the decision of the apostles, appears to have been successful, through the aid

of the Spirit of Peace, in quieting the dissensions which had arisen, and in confirming the souls of the disciples in the true faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. This important point having been established, we read, that "some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again, and visit our brethren, in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." It was upon this occasion that one of those incidents occurred which even in the lives of the best and holiest of men, too plainly evidence that the old Adam still remains, partially uprooted, partially overcome; but still continually struggling for the pre-eminence, and sometimes, alas! obtaining it.

You will recollect, that in a former lecture, we adverted to the circumstance of John Mark having left Paul and Barnabas in the midst of their labours, and returned to Jerusalem; it appears that he had now once more joined them at Antioch, and his presence was the cause

of that unhappy display of unsubdued temper on the part of the apostles, to which we have alluded. "Barnabas determined," says the evangelist, "to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work." Thus far there was nothing amiss; Barnabas probably took the same view of the case as we suggested in the former lecture, that John Mark had withdrawn only for a time, for the purpose of visiting his pious and widowed mother at Jerusalem; but as Mark was "sister's son to Barnabas," it is not improbable that the feelings of relationship might a little influence the apostle, and induce him to look with a more favourable eye upon the desertion of his nephew, than he would have done upon that of a stranger, or than could be expected from St. Paul. But however the cause of their difference upon this occa-

sion might be justified, the manner of it never can, for we are told that " the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder, one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God."

How painful is it, in tracing the history of these men of God, whether it be Abraham, or Jacob, or Peter, or Paul, to find in each and in all, the same root of bitterness, the same remnants of the old and carnal nature, raising its hydra heads through all the opposing influences of divine grace, and proving that endowed as these good men unquestionably were, with the largest outpouring of the Spirit of God, they were still the same poor, fallible mortals as ourselves, carrying about with them a body of sin and death, having the same need of daily application to the atoning blood of Christ, the same necessity for the daily

renewing of His good Spirit. Let those of you, my brethren, who have made the farthest advances in the Christian life, yes, let every one among us, lay this seriously to heart; the greatest knowledge, the highest spirituality of thoughts and views, will not justify the smallest deviation from Christian conduct or Christian tempers. It was a serious blot in the character of these apostles, it cannot be an unimportant one in our own, if hastiness or sullenness, if unkindness or uncharitableness, be permitted to get the better of us, and to expose not only ourselves, but the religion which we profess, to the animadversions of the ungodly or the profane. Especially would I address myself to my younger hearers upon the example before us: if you have been led to adopt more serious views of divine truth than those around you, be increasingly watchful over your tempers. Many who dwelt at Antioch, probably, had heard but little of the devotedness

and piety of Paul and Barnabas; but be assured that *all* heard of their dissension, their violence, and their separation. So will it be with yourselves; while many, even of your nearest friends will have little knowledge of the greater enlightening of your mind, the increased spirituality of your devotions, and of your more frequent and more profitable communion with God, all will know if you are less amiable, less kind, less charitable in the hourly intercourse of life. Be, therefore, most constant in prayer, that you may never be led, by the allowance of any unholy temper, to injure the cause which you really desire to serve. Compel those with whom you dwell to say, 'Although we may think that there is far more attendance to religious duties than can be either necessary or desirable, still we must confess, that this increased solicitude about heavenly things has brought with it a remarkable improvement in earthly things; there is so much more of

love, and gentleness, and obedience, and consideration for the feelings of others, and neglect of self-gratification, and resignation of self-will, that we cannot but tolerate the error (as they esteem it) for the additional domestic virtues by which it is accompanied.' How many a husband has thus been "won by the chaste conversation of his wife," "coupled with fear," the fear of diminishing his happiness, or wounding his feelings! How many a parent, who has at first been induced seriously to oppose the increased religious feeling of a child, has been led by the silent teaching of dutiful, affectionate, consistent conduct, to tolerate, to admire, and finally, by the grace of God, to embrace those blessed principles which have been productive of such invaluable results!

After the separation of Paul and Barnabas, we hear no more of the latter; but it is pleasing to observe that the effects of their dissension do not appear to have

been permanent, for there are notices of John Mark of a later date, when we find St. Paul writing thus to Timothy; "Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry:" and again to the Colossians, "Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, saluteth you, whom if he come unto you receive him; these only," i. e. Mark, and two others, "are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me." It is, therefore, to be hoped that all traces of that unchristian dissension, of which we have spoken, passed away, and that these good men laboured together for the extension of His glory here, in whose presence they are now living and rejoicing together, and shall live and rejoice together when time shall be no longer.

St. Paul, then, having taken Silas with him, departed upon that visit of superintendence to the churches which he had proposed to Barnabas. While at Lystra he first became acquainted with Timothy,

to whom he was afterwards so closely and so dearly attached. His father being a Greek, although his mother was a Jewess, he had never been circumcised; and now we find St. Paul, in direct opposition to the letter of the decree which he had himself advocated, commanding the rite of circumcision to be observed. When circumcision was enforced as necessary to salvation, St. Paul, at the risk of offending the whole body of Jewish converts, would not for a moment tolerate it. But when circumcision, no longer looked upon in this unscriptural light, might be a means of reconciling the Jews to this new convert, the son of a Gentile father, St. Paul so far yielded even to their very prejudices, as not only to sanction, but to command it. How difficult a point, how greatly needing the enlightening power of God's grace to determine, when to conform to the prejudices of those around us, and when to oppose them; resisting, if it be needful, even "unto blood."

Pray for the guidance of God's good Spirit, my brethren, with a determination to follow it in all godly simplicity and sincerity, and you will seldom be left in doubt upon any point affecting the welfare of your soul, or the glory of your God; you will never be left to mistake the dictates of a carnal, time-serving policy, for the inspirations of the Holy Ghost.

At Troas St. Paul was joined by Luke, who accompanied him during his future travellings, and, as the author of the "Acts of the Apostles," recorded them for the benefit of the Church of God in the history upon which we are commenting.

Having been directed by the Almighty in a vision, St. Paul passed at once into Macedonia, and took up his abode at Philippi. While there, an incident occurred of considerable interest, and replete with instruction to us all:—may the Spirit of God convey its important lessons to our hearts!

The inhabitants of Philippi were chiefly,

if not entirely, Roman; there appears not even to have been a Jewish synagogue; and with regard to Christian converts, there does not seem to have been one in the colony. Upon inquiry, however, St. Paul discovered that there was a little company of women who had become "proselytes of the gate," as it was termed, or believers in the God of Israel, although without adopting all the ceremonial peculiarities of Israel. He learnt yet further, that these poor women were in the habit of assembling for prayer on a river's side, at some little distance from the city, probably to avoid the noise and tumult of the idolaters, on a day devoted to the service of God.

It appears that the whole company assembled for this hallowed purpose were women.

Thus, even from the earliest ages of the Church of Christ, has the weaker sex put to shame the stronger. In the days of Christ himself, as has often been re-

marked, they were the last who left his cross, they were the first who sought his tomb. In the times of the greatest spiritual deadness, when an almost universal worldliness has overspread the Church of Christ, religion, true, vital religion, has been found still lingering in the female bosom; and in the times of the greatest spiritual revivals, it has always been observed that women have been foremost in the holy course. If we ask at the present moment, who evince the greatest zeal in every good and holy work, to whom are we indebted, instrumentally, for the first breathings of devotion in the hearts of the young, who chiefly instruct the children of the poor, visit the parents in sickness, carry, not merely temporal aid, but, far more valuable, the comforts and consolations of Jesus to many a sick chamber and many a dying pillow,—we cannot but reply—Christian women. Yes, with all their infirmities, and they are not few; with all their sins, and they are not

small; with all their follies, and they are neither few nor small; they are not usually ashamed of the God they worship, the Saviour they adore; they honour His name, they love His service, they fill his churches, and evince by their devotedness to the cause of His truth, that if the worldliness, and ambition, and coldness, and indifference of our sex, would long since have driven back the Spirit of Peace to the abodes of peace from which He came, Christian women, by their prayers, and zeal, and love, have been the blessed instruments, in the hands of God, of detaining among us the Spiritual Messenger. The reason is obvious; the religion of Jesus Christ has its residence in the heart: "with the heart," we are told, "man believeth unto righteousness," and if "our bodies," then especially our hearts, "are the temples of the Holy Ghost." It is, therefore, no matter of surprise that they whose hearts are formed by God our Creator, the most tender, the most ardent,

the most affectionate, should be made, the most frequently, by God our Redeemer and Sanctifier, the depositories of this blessed gift.

Do I mention this to court the approbation, or inflate the vanity, of you, my female hearers? God forbid! yea, rather to prove you, and to humble you, and to show you what is in your hearts. Has the Almighty in mercy bestowed upon you feelings and affections, and qualities of mind, which he has in many instances denied to men; then what return are you making for these decided superiorities? You possess a greater degree of tenderness than men—we acknowledge it; does it then evince itself, not by the excesses of a foolish sensibility, but by inducing such a tenderness of conscience, that you shrink from the approach of the smallest sin, and dread the pollution of an unhallowed thought?

You possess more ardent minds than men—we acknowledge it: does your zeal

exhaust itself in the frivolities of a passing, perishing world, utterly unworthy of you? or, like Elijah of old, are you "very zealous for the Lord God of hosts?"

You possess stronger and sweeter affections than men: how do you bestow them? by over-loving some poor, sinful, earthly object, whom your glowing imagination has arrayed in every fancied and fabulous superiority, but who is, after all, a fragile reed, which will inevitably fail you, if you lean upon it? or by loving the Lord your God, as revealed to you in Christ Jesus, with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength?

You possess more powerful influence over those you love; how do you employ it? by leading them still deeper into the paths of worldliness and folly? or by wisely, judiciously, and prayerfully endeavouring to win them to Christ?

Be assured, your affections, your zeal, your influence, while they rank thus highly among the endowments which you

now possess, will rank equally highly among the talents for which, on the last great day, you will be called to reckon. Glorious, for the sake of your Redeemer, will be the sentence of those among you who are devoting yourselves, your souls, your bodies, to the service of the Lord; tremendous the condemnation of those wicked servants, who have prostituted their Lord's gifts to the service of His eternal enemy, and of those unprofitable servants who have buried their Lord's talent in the earth, instead of returning His own "with usury."[1]

St. Paul having discovered, with the persevering zeal of his divine Master, the little company of women, of whom we have spoken, and found them at their accustomed place of Sabbath resort, and engaged in their Sabbath occupation, sat down with them by the river side, and talked to them of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. They had before known the

[1] Matt. xxv. 27.

true God, as revealed to them in the Jewish Scriptures, St. Paul now taught them to know Him as far more clearly manifested to them in the Son of his love. How improbable was such a circumstance in such a place! The inhabitants of a heathen city, withdrawing from its abominations to seek the God of truth in this secluded spot, and finding there a preacher of the Gospel, and, better far, the Saviour whom he preached: so truly did our Lord promise, "Unto you who have shall more be given;" so, undoubtedly, may it be affirmed, that wherever God has a people, there will He send the bread of life; that wherever Christ has a flock, there will He send a shepherd to tend it.

"And a certain woman," continues the evangelist, "named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

How blessed an effect of a single discourse, when the Spirit of God accompanies it! How many discourses have you heard, my brethren, upon the same all-important theme, and yet, perhaps, have never yet sought the Spirit of God, to open your hearts, and to teach you profitably and savingly to attend to them. Lydia "*attended* unto the things spoken;" the word, in the original, means something more than a mere external attention, a mere listening; it signifies, to apply the mind, to be deeply engaged in what is said. By this, then, you may in some degree determine whether God has opened your heart: do you not only hear, whenever an opportunity is offered, but do you so seriously attend to the things spoken, as to endeavour to apply the great truths set before you to your own soul? Are you deeply interested in these things? Have you a growing delight in them? Do you find your knowledge, and your love of spiritual

truth increase; your hatred of sin, your love of the Saviour, your resignation of your own will, your devotedness to the will of God, grow and strengthen while you hear? And do you act honestly and faithfully according to your convictions, renouncing such things as the word of God forbids, and cultivating such affections of heart, and practising such duties, as it commands? These are proofs of hearing and attending to the word preached; proofs, without which your bodily presence in this house of prayer will be found, at the last day, to have profited you nothing.

But we must conclude this instructive story;—Lydia was converted, truly converted to the faith of Jesus Christ, and received "the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace," for she was baptized with her household:—her children—for she rightly believed that the promises are to us and to our seed, and that in bringing them to bap-

tism, she was, as far as in her lay, bringing them to Christ; her servants—for it would appear that it pleased God to bless the preaching of the apostles in due time, to the conversion of her whole house.

The fruits of her own change of heart were immediately apparent in her life and conversation, for she thus addressed St. Paul and his companions: "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us." It was thus that as soon as her heart was opened to receive Christ, her house was opened to receive His people—as soon as her affections were united to the Saviour, they were united to the saints: demonstrating that hers was "a faith which worketh by love," and which made her willing, for the sake of her divine Master, to entertain the poorest and most despised among his servants, and this at the obvious hazard of contempt and obloquy, and even of persecution and death itself. My brethren,

if yours be the faith of Lydia, it will be as lively, as operative, as influential; it will rejoice in every good and holy work, "especially towards them which are of the household of faith;" it will induce you to seek the society and friendship of those on earth with whom you hope to dwell throughout eternity; you will love the poorest and meanest of the people of Christ, in proportion to the clearness with which His image is impressed upon them; you will delight in alleviating their sorrows, in supplying their necessities, in administering to their comforts; thus, according to our Lord's most remarkable injunction, "making to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" turning the devil's weapons against himself, by employing the wealth with which he would overwhelm and suffocate your spiritual life, into an instrument to advance the glory of God, the happiness of His people, and the measure of your own temporal and eternal felicity.

LECTURE X.

ACTS XVI. 25.

"AND AT MIDNIGHT PAUL AND SILAS PRAYED, AND SANG PRAISES UNTO GOD; AND THE PRISONERS HEARD THEM."

AFTER the conversion of Lydia, which formed the subject of our last lecture, we find St. Paul remaining still at Philippi, no longer in obscurity, but brought, by the incident upon which we are about to comment, into great and painful notoriety.

For the purpose of spreading still more widely in Philippi the good seed, of which he had made a commencement "at the river's side," St. Paul appears to have

gone thither every day to speak upon the same blessed and profitable truths. Perhaps the little company of devout women who worshipped there had added to their numbers, and were daily bringing others, from among their relatives and friends, to listen to the life-giving words which fell from the lips of the apostle.

However this may have been, one thing is certain, that our spiritual enemy began to envy his success, and determined, so far as in him lay, to obstruct and to ruin it. The method by which he attempted to carry into effect his guilty design was a very remarkable one; it was not, as he had done in the case of our Lord and the apostles, by ridiculing and degrading the teachers, and by controverting and bringing into contempt the doctrines; far from it: his present plan of attack was infinitely less obvious, but in proportion more dangerous and destructive. You shall hear it in the evangelist's own words: "As we went to

prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation: and this she did many days."

"The servants of the most high God" were acknowledged and flattered by "the enemy of all righteousness,"—one of the most fatal methods by which Satan still opposes the progress of the word of truth, in the world, and in the heart. My younger brethren, learn to question the sincerity, or the sense, of all who flatter you, especially upon your religious attainments; remember that your Lord has for ever decided the amount of praise to which you are entitled, for He has said, "When you have done all, you are *unprofitable* servants; you have done that which was your duty to do:" and who among you will venture to affirm that he has

even done all, or attempted to do all, which the word of God, and the Spirit of God, and his own enlightened conscience, have commanded him to do? Observe again, that it was while going to prayer that Satan urged his repeated attacks against St. Paul. Never does your spiritual enemy rage more fiercely than when you are going to prayer. By every artifice which he can invent, he will strive to keep you from it. Is it to private prayer you are going? he will endeavour to persuade you that you have not time at present, or that you are not in a right frame of mind, or that you are not enjoying the presence of God, and that another season will be more auspicious. Is it to public prayer? you will endanger your health; the weather is too damp, or too cold, or the church is too hot, or some friend calls upon you at the moment, and renders it impossible--Yes, impossible to those who fear man, rather than God. The method, however, which Satan adopted against the

apostles was, as we have seen, by sounding their praise publicly in the streets of the city, crying after them continually, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation."

How painful to the apostles must such a testimony have been, when borne to them by such a being! Every day as they went to their oratory, to meet the Lord's little flock, and to preach unto them Jesus, did this poor, possessed woman follow them through the streets of the city, and by the power of the devil, which she was unable to resist, offer this true, but, from such a source, most distressing and dangerous testimony. For whatever might be the effect upon the minds of the apostles, the effect upon the mind of the passer-by would naturally be, If Satan bear such favourable testimony to these men, surely they are in league with Satan; the Saviour whom they preach must be an impostor, and His

gospel a delusion; all that they teach, all that they do, must be taught and done "through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils." Such a conclusion was inevitable, and such a conclusion was, no doubt, intended by our spiritual adversary to have been the effect of the incident we have narrated.

Day after day, for "many days," did the apostles suffer in patience and in silence, until at length, "Paul being grieved" for the state of her who spake, and doubtless, still more grieved for the discredit which would thus be attached to his Master's name, and his Master's service, invoked the power of that Master to free him from these opponents.

You will observe, it says expressly, "Paul was grieved," not enraged; he spake far more in sorrow than in anger. This also we would desire, should be the feeling of our own heart in rebuking sin. We would grieve for those among you who, like the damsel before us, applaud the teacher,

but neglect the lesson; we would grieve for those who believe that the ministers of religion are really "the servants of the most high God," and yet remain indifferent to the message which they bring; we would grieve for those among you to whom, sabbath after sabbath, is "shown the way of salvation," and yet who have never yet sought earnestly the aid of the Spirit of God to bring you to Him, "who is the way, the truth, and the life." Paul, then, "being grieved," turned and said to the spirit, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her; and he came out the same hour."

But the devil was not to be thus easily foiled; if he cannot win us by his flatteries and his favours, he will, if possible, crush us by his opposition. "When her masters," those wicked men who made a merchandize of the calamity of this poor creature, by selling her juggling prophecies to the best customer, "saw that" since the devil was cast out, "the hope of their gains was

gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and carried them before the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city."

Behold another instance of that accusation, which from the days of Christ himself, to the present hour, has been put, by our spiritual enemy, into the mouth of the opponents of the gospel of Jesus Christ: the apostles troubled the city! Yes, they did trouble it, but it was, as the angel troubled the pool of Bethesda, that he who entered in, might be healed. Blessed is that city, or that family, or that heart, which is so troubled; godly trouble is the first forerunner of that "peace of God which passeth all understanding."

This, however, was not the view which we could expect to be taken by heathen magistrates, and a heathen people; we are accordingly told, that "the multitude rose up against them, and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them; and when they had laid many

stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely. Who having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks:" a remarkable instance of unnecessary cruelty on the part of the jailor, and of the harshness of his disposition; for it is obvious that with the bolts, and bars, and chains of a prison, he might have kept his prisoners in perfect security, without subjecting them to the still closer confinement of the inner prison, or the still greater inconvenience of the stocks.

Let us for a moment contemplate the apostle in this helpless and pitiable situation. He refers to it twice himself in his succeeding epistles, when he tells the Corinthians, "Thrice was I beaten with rods," "in stripes above measure," i.e. more than were allowed by law; and again, when he says to the Thessalonians, "We were shamefully intreated, as ye know, at Philippi." Good reason had he to speak

of it thus. For performing a miracle of mercy and compassion, he was treated worse than the law would have treated the lowest and most degraded malefactor. He was torn from his beloved assemblage of Christian friends, his garments rent from off his shoulders, his back lacerated with scourges, his feet crushed in the stocks, and he himself lying in the lowest dungeon to await, what he had every reason to expect would be, the far more terrible sentence of the succeeding morning. Truly, if we had seen him thus, we should have been tempted to exclaim, O Satan, thou hast conquered!

But, my brethren, judge nothing before the time; there are days in the life of every individual, there are moments in the experience of us all, when, if we were to give sentence upon the passing hour, we should arrive at a similar result; when our spiritual enemy has so far succeeded in his machinations, that, reasoning according to carnal nature, we should be

compelled to exclaim, 'All is over; I am trodden into the dust beneath the feet of my eternal enemy, and I shall rise no more:'—at such moments, instead of crying with the desponding patriarch, "All these things are against me," endeavour to realize something of the blessed confidence of the psalmist; say, with the eye of faith steadily fixed upon the Saviour, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance."

Let us, then, follow St. Paul to the innermost prison; examine, if possible, into his state of mind, and see whether we shall find him sinking beneath the accumulation of adverse circumstances to which we have alluded. The time, the evangelist declares, was midnight; the place, the lowest dungeon; the persons of whom he speaks, Paul and Silas, who had a few hours before been most severely and cruelly punished. And what was

their occupation? Bemoaning their unhappy fate? Bewailing their misery, from which there appeared to be no escape? Repining at the apparent desertion of Him whose name they bore? Nothing of all this. They betook themselves in humble and cheerful confidence to God. "At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them." So little were they cast down by their present situation, that they could sing the praises of God; so little were they ashamed of their occupation, that although they were in the innermost prison, their prayers for deliverance, and their hymns of praise, resounded throughout the whole of that dreary abode, and were heard by all its wretched inmates. They praised God: what could they find to praise Him for at such an hour, and under such trying circumstances? Doubtless they praised Him that "they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name's sake." In what

situation can you ever be placed, my brethren, with such an example as this before you, in which you can consider prayer as hopeless, or praise as unappropriate? How does it condemn many among ourselves, who, placed in the midst of prosperity and happiness, hardly know what it is from the heart to praise God! O, be more in praise as well as prayer, for a thankless Christian is one of the most disgraceful characters upon which the all-seeing eye of God can ever fall.

But let us look at the effect of the apostle's prayers. "Suddenly,"—yes, before the last accents of those praises had died upon the ear, before the last sentence of their petitions had fallen from their lips, the cry for deliverance was heard and answered,—"Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed." How triumphant a moment for the apostles, how invaluable

a testimony to the other prisoners, of the power and mercy of Him, with whose praises the vaults of that prison-house had so lately rung! Of its effect upon the prisoners, nothing is recorded; we may hope that not only "the doors were opened," but that many hearts also, like Lydia's, were "opened to attend to the things spoken of Paul;" that not only their "bands were loosed;" but that the fetters which had so long bound them to the service of Satan were broken, and that their feet were set at liberty to run the way of God's commandments.

The Spirit of God, however, has not left us in total ignorance of the effect of that supernatural interposition; there probably were many, there certainly was one, who will have cause to bless God through all eternity for the events of that fearful night. The morose and savage jailor, he who neither feared God nor regarded man, he it was, who awaking out of his sleep at the rocking of the

earthquake, and finding the prison doors open, and an awful stillness reigning throughout, imagined that the prisoners had fled, and that, doubtless, he should have to expiate his apparent carelessness by an ignominious death; in the first paroxysm of despair, therefore, he "drew out his sword, and would have killed himself. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out." How changed, how softened, how subdued! The lion becomes a lamb; the jailor bows before his prisoners, leads them forth out of the lowest dungeon into his own house, and finally addresses them in terms of the most profound respect, as well as of the deepest anxiety, saying, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Tell me of that God to whom your prayers and praises were addressed, and who has wrought for you this won-

derful deliverance; tell me of that Being whose name you bear—how can I propitiate His anger, secure His favour, deliver my soul? O, how deeply must our spiritual enemy, when too late, have bewailed his folly in carrying his opposition to so extreme a length! While the disciples were for many days at large in Philippi, we hear but of one woman who was entirely converted to the Lord; but a single night in prison and in fetters, has brought, not only a hardened sinner, but, as we shall hereafter see, a whole family, to God! What a testimony to Satan's folly and weakness, and to the wisdom and strength of Him in whom we trust. How often afterwards exemplified, when "the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church!"

But we must hasten to observe the brevity, the simplicity, and yet the abounding fulness of St. Paul's reply: behold the gospel condensed, if we may so say, into a single verse, They an-

swered the inquiring sinner, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

How blessed and soul-satisfying a reply! All that the most despairing sinner could need; all that the most weary and heavy laden sinner could require; all that the most ignorant sinner could ask, is contained in these few but comprehensive words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Let me, then, inquire of you, my brethren, have they ever yet been carried by the Spirit of God to your hearts? If not, be assured that no cruel and degraded jailor, no persecuting Saul, no hardened and crucified thief, ever needed them more than yourselves. No: however offensive this truth may be to many, no one ever needed them more certainly than the most virtuous, most amiable, most lovely among you.

They reveal the one, the only way to the Father, the way which every prophet,

and martyr, and saint, who ever lived, must, if he be now in glory, have sought, and found, and travelled, while on earth: for there is none other,—there is not one way for the saint, and another for the sinner; one for the moralist, and another for the reprobate; there is "no royal road" to heaven: the sceptered monarch and the fettered malefactor have equal need of the atoning blood, the justifying righteousness, the sanctifying Spirit, of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not, therefore, inquire, How have you lived, or how are you living? how moral, how virtuous, how charitable have you been? But we inquire, and we would, as in the sight of God who seeth the heart, solemnly demand it of every man, every woman, every child now before us, Have you ever asked, with a deeply contrite, humbled heart, this great, this all-important question, "What must I do to be saved?" If you would enter into the kingdom of God, you must ask it, and

not merely ask it as Pilate asked, "What is truth?" without caring one iota for the reply, without even waiting to hear it; but you must ask it seriously, earnestly, prayerfully, as if heaven or hell depended upon the answer. For such, most assuredly, is the fact: they do depend upon it. We scruple not to say, that your fate for weal or woe throughout eternity depends upon it; for as you hear, as you receive, as you improve the answer, so will the countless ages of that eternity be passed.

That answer, then, can only be given in the words of St. Paul, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Believe that He lived, and died, and rose again, to reconcile you to your God. Away with all human merits, cast far from you all human dependence, and come with a simple and entire reliance upon the finished work of the salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out: receive Him in the whole of His

mediatorial character into a penitent and renewed heart: cast all your burden of sins, of sorrows, and of troubles, upon Him, and confide in Him with an obeying faith for all you want, and all you can ever want, for time and for eternity.

This is the belief to which St. Paul alluded; this is the belief of which he declared, "Believe, and thou shalt be saved." A belief which must, indeed, be the sole work of God's good Spirit, but which will never be withheld, if that Spirit be earnestly, faithfully, perseveringly sought for.

St. Paul having declared this great and saving faith to the jailor, did not suffer it to fall lifeless upon his ear, but dwelt upon it, as he loved to do, in all its abundant and overflowing richness; he "spake unto him the word of the Lord," says the evangelist; and we can well imagine how much is implied, we can well conjecture how the remainder of

that night was spent; how he told of all that Jesus did, and said, and taught, and suffered, and purchased. Surely our hearts would have burned within us, had we been in that blessed company. What a new world must have been opened up to the mind of that heathen jailor; what sorrow for the past, what joys for the present, what hopes for the future! A coming state, of the existence of which he had never known; a Saviour full of love, and tenderness, and compassion, of whom he had never heard; joys unutterable, and full of glory, at God's right hand, of which he had never conceived; and all freely offered, freely made over even to him, the darkest and the guiltiest! O, what a blessed hour was that which brought St. Paul into his custody; what blessed tidings were those which brought the Redeemer into his heart! And, my brethren, will not the present hour be as blessed an hour to you, if the same merciful tidings find their way by

the Spirit of God to *your* hearts? If any among you have never yet really beheld the beautiful simplicity of the gospel, but have been striving and toiling, according to some perplexed and complicated system of human ingenuity, to reconcile yourselves to God, now to find that all is easy, all is simple, all is within the comprehension of the most ignorant, the reach of the most helpless, the hopes of the most guilty; all as freely offered to you, as to him of whom we have been speaking. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." My beloved brethren, "turn not away from Him who speaketh from heaven." Receive as freely, as it is freely offered; pray earnestly for such a disposition of heart, as shall enable you now, this day, this moment, to close with the offers of your adorable Redeemer, to become one with Him, and He with you, for ever and for ever. So doing, every

sin is blotted out, every transgression forgiven; grace, and holiness, and happiness, and heaven, are your own; for "he that hath the Son, hath life," spiritual and eternal. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," is the declaration of that Son himself, who has added, "He that receiveth my testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." May you set your seal to this all-important truth this day, and may you be among that blessed, and holy, and happy number, whom the Spirit of God has sealed unto the day of redemption.

LECTURE XI.

ACTS XVII. part of the 6th verse.

"THESE THAT HAVE TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN ARE COME HITHER ALSO."

WE concluded the last lecture with the account of the wonderful conversion of the jailor at Philippi; but the time did not admit of our remarking upon the effects of that conversion, which were as obvious as those in the case of Lydia. For we are told in the 33d verse, that the jailor took the disciples "the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and when he had brought them into the house, he set meat before them." Such were the immediate effects of a true and saving faith; having begun to love an

unseen Saviour, he began also to love His suffering followers; for "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The whole heart and conduct, therefore, of the jailor were changed. He who the evening before had "thrust the disciples into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks," now himself washes the wounds of these very prisoners; anoints the deep and painful lacerations which they had received from the "many stripes" that had been inflicted by the magistrates; and affords these poor sufferers the refreshment of food, of which they stood so greatly in need.

How invariably does the same conduct flow from the same principle! When the jailor anxiously inquired, "What shall I do to be saved?" we do not find St. Paul answering, 'Supply the wants of your suffering fellow-creatures, be pitiful, be courteous.' No; he makes, what many in the present day would term a most dan-

gerous and injudicious reply; he confines himself simply to the one great leading doctrine of the gospel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Not one word of duties, not one word of Christian charity and love, as either in whole, or in part, the ground of salvation. Here, as the objector of this world would say, here is a solifidian indeed; a man who preaches faith without works, who says, "Believe," and all will be well—how dangerous, how delusive a doctrine! Such is the manner in which men have reasoned, and men do reason, and men will continue to reason, so long as there is one unenlightened mind, one unconverted heart. It is in vain to reply, "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Once let this be effectually laid by the Spirit of God in the renewed heart of the believer, and every Christian grace and moral duty will assuredly form the beauteous superstructure. It is in vain,

I say, that we reason thus; the objector and the caviller, the wilfully ignorant, and the maliciously ignorant, repeat the same charge, and exult in the same accusation, that the doctrines of the gospel are licentious doctrines, and that they who preach the faith of the gospel, give full permission to those who hold it, to live as they please. Our answer, the only satisfactory answer to all such, is, Look at the experience of eighteen centuries. Wherever we find the apostles desired to state the ground of salvation, they state it to consist in a true and living faith, or rather in that one great sacrifice, which a true and living faith appropriates and brings home to the sinner's heart; they do this in the most intelligible and simple language, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and wherever in Holy Writ we find an individual who is made willing, by the grace of God, to receive this direction in the love of it, there we as invariably find

the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, kindness, charity, springing into existence in his life and conversation, and one or other of these fruits usually recorded in the word of God for our instruction. What is thus authenticated in the scripture of truth, is, as I have just said, corroborated by eighteen centuries of living example; is demonstrated at the present day; that the good tree will produce the good fruits; that the faith of Christ Jesus in the heart will bring forth holiness, and obedience, and love, in the life. For may we not with propriety inquire, Who are they who are the chief supporters of every charity? who are they who are foremost in every good and holy work? who are they from whom even the world itself, with an absurdity and contradiction pre-eminently its own, always expects the greatest strictness, the most rigid uprightness, the most abounding charity, but the very persons whom it accuses of

holding the licentious and inoperative doctrine of justification by faith only? Is not the world daily and hourly guilty of this incongruity, my brethren? Would it tolerate in the life of these men one thousandth part of the immorality, which it not only tolerates, but applauds in the lives of its own followers? And what does this prove, but the very fact which we are endeavouring to establish, that so invariably does the faith of the gospel produce the fruits of the gospel, "our enemies themselves being our judges," that almost in spite of themselves, and in obvious opposition to their own repeated assertions, they do expect to find, and, blessed be God, they usually do find, consistent holiness, integrity, and charity, in the lives of those, who with the jailor at Philippi, have been taught that they shall be saved, simply and entirely, instrumentally, by "believing on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Continuing the narrative, we are told,

"When it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let these men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now, therefore, depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out."

When you are compelled, and there are cases in which the meekest and most merciful may be compelled, to proceed against an adversary, content yourself with the smallest portion of retributive justice which will place your cause upon such a footing as the honour of the gospel and your own character require; having obtained this, be content, remembering who has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Were this direction followed, how much of the bitterness and heartburning, which now divide

even Christian friends and Christian families, would be averted, and how much more of heaven would even here be enjoyed by those who are preparing for it hereafter!

St. Paul, in this instance, affords us a remarkable example of the union of the two Christian duties, firmness and forbearance; he compels the magistrates to humble themselves, and to reverse their unjust sentence, by going in person to the prison and fetching him out; but he does not, as he might have done, institute a rigorous prosecution against them, and subject them to heavy penalties for an obvious infraction of the well known Roman law, which enacted that no Roman citizen should, without trial, be either "beaten or bound."

We read, in continuation, that "the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates, and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out."

After a short sojourn at the house of Lydia, probably to make her acquainted with the conversion of the jailor, and thus to lay the foundation of that church of the Philippians, which, during nine succeeding centuries was a spiritual and flourishing branch of the Church of Christ, St. Paul departed, and, as the evangelist informs us, "came to Thessalonica." He had only preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ there for three weeks, when such was his success, that we are told, "Some believed and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few." How remarkable is it, in tracing the footsteps of St. Paul, to observe the widely-differing effects of divine grace. In one city he remains for many days, and we hear only of two families converted; in another he preaches but for three sabbaths, and we are told that a great multitude believe; and yet, in both cases,

there were the same truths, and the same preachers.

And do we not behold similar effects, and equally remarkable, even at the present time? While in one congregation, "the word preached does not profit," as the apostle says, "not being mixed with faith in them that hear it:" in another, many ears are open to hear, and many hearts to receive, and multitudes, to use the prophet's simile, "fly as doves to their windows," to the sound of the gospel, and better still, to the Lord of the gospel. O, let us pray that this may be abundantly realized among ourselves, that there may be "added to the Church daily, numbers of such as shall be saved," until the whole of the little flock of Christ among us shall be gathered out of a perishing world, and be added to that vast multitude which no man can number, of all people, and nations, and kindred, and tongues, who worship before the throne and before the Lamb for ever and ever.

No sooner had the effects of St. Paul's preaching become visible in the numerous conversions of which we have spoken, than, as in all preceding cases, persecution followed. So invariably was this the case, that it imparts a feeling of repetition to the narrative which we could almost desire to avoid. And yet if the Spirit of God has seen fit in His infinite wisdom, to record these facts, would it be our wisdom to omit or pass them by? No; doubtless there is a distinct and separate lesson to be learnt from every repetition of this kind which we meet with in Holy Writ, and our prayers must be, from each fresh incident, to be permitted to gather the instruction it was intended to impart. Sometimes the motives, sometimes the actions, and sometimes the persons of the persecutors, are dwelt upon; the last of these in the present instance is made the most prominent, for we are told the Jews which believed not took unto them "certain

lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set the whole city in an uproar."

This was the class of men who, in the earliest ages of Christianity, waged the most unceasing warfare against the truths and the followers of the gospel; and wherever an opposition is excited, this is the class of men who even now swell the ranks of our opponents. Look at the private history of the infidels who were the most distinguished for their opposition to Christianity during the last century: look at the infidel poets and infidel demagogues in the present, and do you not find that, with one or two exceptions, they deserved the appellation of the apostle, "lewd fellows of the baser sort;" men, however high their station in society, as much distinguished for the laxity of their morals and the irregularities of their private conduct, as for the bitterness of their animosity to the revealed word of our God exhibited in their pub-

lished opinions. Thus does the Almighty sometimes overrule the hatred of Satan, by obliging him to make use of such instruments as shall, to the mind of every unprejudiced inquirer into divine truth, convey an antidote with the poison; for what reflecting man can be for a moment misled by the arguments of those opponents to the truth of God's word, who have so obvious a motive, as an unholy life supplies, for desiring to find the tremendous revelations of the gospel, its day of righteous judgment, and its eternity of woe to the unrepentant sinner, a "cunningly devised fable?" I would impress this argument upon the minds of my younger hearers more especially, because there is, I am convinced, much weight in it; so much that we almost invariably find an infidel opposition to the *doctrines* of the gospel bear a very distinct proportion to the departure in the life of the opponent from the humbling and self-denying *precepts* of the Gospel.

But let us pass from the character of the enemies of St. Paul at Thessalonica, to the nature of their charge: "These men that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also." Yes, my brethren, this was the accusation, and, wonderful to relate, it was, although not in the sense their accusers intended, perfectly just and perfectly true. Thanks be to God, the apostles did "turn the world upside down," when the preaching of a few poor fishermen, directed by the omnipotence of God's good Spirit, overthrew the splendid theology of Greece and Rome, emptied their temples, and planted the cross of a crucified Saviour upon their ruins; destroyed the most profound speculations of their deepest philosophers, and at length brought the emperor of the world to confess, that in the sign of the cross of Jesus Christ he alone could be victorious. And so far are we, their unworthy successors, at the present day, from shrinking from a similar accusation, that it is our

glory and our boast; we desire to wage a war of extermination against the sinful principles and practices of that world, of which our Lord has said, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world:" we would most earnestly desire to see the love of the world, and the fear of the world, and the ways of the world, so completely eradicated from the hearts of our hearers, that our enemies might again declare with truth, "These men have turned the world upside down," have emptied the assemblies of the worldly, the haunts of the profligate, the dens of the drunkard, the theatres of the ungodly, as their predecessors did the temples of the devil; until the love of God in Christ Jesus, and the delights of His service, and the blessedness of a close and intimate companionship with Him, shall, in the heart of every true believer, take the place of that system of idolatry and alienation from God, which is sealing

up the world for the day of its final and irrevocable judgments.

My Christian brethren, has any such effect as this been produced within you? Has the world been overthrown in the temple of your heart? or is it still dominant, still paramount? Is that great and engrossing idol taken down from its pedestal only for this little hour, to be carefully replaced as soon as you leave this house, or, at the farthest, before another sun shall dawn upon you? This is not sufficient: this is not the effect which the preaching of the gospel is intended to produce; the cross of a crucified Saviour cannot stand upon that pedestal to-day, on which the idol of the world is to be re-erected to-morrow; it refuses to stand side by side with it; it must be there alone, or it will not be there at all; your idol, like the Dagon of the Philistines, must be thrown down, broken to pieces, trampled under foot, or the work of the

Spirit is not wrought within you, God is not honoured, Christ is not glorified, you are not serving Him now, for "you cannot serve God and mammon," you will not serve Him in eternity. Be warned, then, you who are temporising in this matter, living, or vainly hoping to live, for both worlds, see the folly, the fruitlessness of the attempt. Pray that the world may be "turned upside down" within your heart, that it may never be re-established, never resume its dominion, but lie there a broken and discarded idol, till even its very fragments shall be dissolved amidst the brightness of your Redeemer's coming.

The apostles having been preserved from the effects of the opposition of which we have spoken, we next find St. Paul under very different circumstances, and in a very different place, even in the polite, the learned, the refined city of Athens; surrounded by philosophers falsely so called, and invited

by epicureans and stoics to preach to them "the gospel of Christ." There are few situations in which, throughout his whole history, St. Paul is ever presented to us, that required so much of the wisdom which is from above, as that in which we find him here. He was not now called to converse with the simple-hearted Lydia, or the ignorant jailor, but to address the learned and the acute—the infidel, who scoffed alike at all religions, and the wise in their own conceits, who particularly despised "the doctrine of Jesus and the resurrection."

On this occasion, then, if on any, we might have expected a display of the most astonishing eloquence, and the most deep and recondite reasoning; for here were persons who could thoroughly appreciate it, and to whom, if to any, it would be peculiarly and remarkably applicable. But no: St. Paul has recorded his own opinion upon this matter, when he said, "And I, brethren, when I came

to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God; for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." We find, therefore, that while he addressed himself to the task with all needful ability and prudence, his discourse was just as simple, just as unadorned, just as entirely pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation, as it was upon the river's side at Lystra, or in the jailor's room at Philippi.

Although it would be going beyond the limit of these lectures to comment upon his discourse, it will not be uninteresting to advert to the subject of it.

It appears, then, that as St. Paul

passed through the streets at Athens, and observed their temples and their altars, he found one of the latter with this remarkable inscription, "To the unknown God." He, therefore, at once adopted these words for his text; and having thus attracted the attention of that inquisitive people, and awakened their curiosity, he proceeded to demonstrate to them, that the Being to whom they had in ignorance dedicated this altar, was in fact the triune Jehovah, the God of the Christian, "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

My brethren, are you disposed to think, that although this might be a very appropriate subject for a Gentile auditory, it would be a most ill-timed and ill-chosen topic upon which to address ourselves to professing Christians? Then suffer me to make another inquiry: Think you that in a Christian country no altars are ever erected, no knees are

bent, no prayers are offered, to an "unknown God?"

In looking abroad on the world, we behold some who are respectable and upright, conscientious in the discharge of all their relative duties, high-minded and honourable, men of talent, men of wisdom, men of excellent character and conduct; upon every other subject admirably well read, and well informed. But ask these men what they know of God? and, alas! how lamentable is their deficiency! If their altars were rightly inscribed, we fear the Athenian inscription must be their own, "To the unknown God." For with all their superior advantages of time, and talents, and wisdom, and learning, the humblest mechanic, the poorest peasant, with the Bible in his hand, and the Spirit of God within his heart, sees more and knows more of God, than some of our wisest statesmen and most profound philosophers. Do you inquire, whence is

this? we reply, Because this poor, unlettered man has been "taught of God;" because he has been led by God's good Spirit into that path in which it is declared, that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein;" because he has been brought to "see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," the only manner in which, while in this world of sin and infirmity, it will ever be discernible.

Examine yourselves carefully, then, my beloved brethren, whether you know the great Jehovah thus, as a God who is to be seen, and known, and approached, only through the Son of His love; a God, who thus sought, condescends to manifest Himself to the weakest and the most ignorant, who "is not ashamed to be called their God," because He has opened to them a new and living way by the blood of Jesus, through which He is guiding their footsteps into the paths of peace; a God who has

prepared for them a city; "has blotted out as a cloud their transgressions, and as a thick cloud their sins," and has made them accepted in the beloved. If you, through divine grace, so know Him, He is no longer to you an "unknown God;" "flesh and blood have not revealed" this knowledge unto you, "but your Father which is in heaven." You know that, which the worldly-learned, however refined and intelligent, have never known; you have been now made partakers of a knowledge which has been denied to kings and prophets, to the wise and prudent, and yet freely dispensed to the poor, the ignorant, and the babe—a knowledge of which all that you now know, valuable and important as it is, is but little, compared with what yet remains to be known, even here, of the unsearchable riches of Christ; and as nothing, and less than nothing, compared with that which you shall know hereafter.

'Though something of Christ be unfolded in one age,' says an old divine, 'and something in another, yet eternity itself cannot fully unfold Him.' 'I see something,' said Luther, 'which blessed Austin saw not; and those that come after me, will see that which I see not.' It is in the studying of Christ, as in the planting of a newly-discovered country; at first men sit down by the sea-side upon the skirts and borders of the land, and there they dwell; but by degrees they search farther and farther into the heart of the country: Ah! the best of us are yet but upon the borders of this vast continent. May God of his infinite mercy grant, that you and I, my beloved brethren, may be steadily advancing, obtaining more knowledge, more grace, more love, until there be nothing to be learned, but that which perfect vision and perfect fruition alone can teach us!

LECTURE XII.

ACTS XIX. 2, 3.

"HE SAID UNTO THEM, HAVE YE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST SINCE YE BELIEVED? AND THEY SAID UNTO HIM, WE HAVE NOT SO MUCH AS HEARD WHETHER THERE BE ANY HOLY GHOST; AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, UNTO WHAT THEN WERE YE BAPTIZED?"

THE last lecture concluded with a brief review of St. Paul's sermon at Athens, of the effect of which we are informed at the conclusion of the 17th chapter, where it is said, "Howbeit, certain men clave unto him, and believed." How strong is that expression, "clave unto him:" there is no room for change, or fickleness, or vacillation; they believed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and gave them-

selves up to him with full purpose of heart, to be ruled by him, and saved by him, to "follow the Lord fully;" that the same winds of persecution which blew others away from him, should only drive them the closer to the Saviour, to whom, in the beautiful language of an uneducated peasant, they clave "as the limpet to the rock." "Among the which," continues the evangelist, "was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with him." It was this Dionysius of whom the earliest Christian historians relate, that being at Heliopolis in Egypt, at the time of our Lord's crucifixion, when he beheld the mid-day darkness which attended that awful event, he exclaimed, "Either the God of nature suffers, or the frame of the world will be dissolved." His thoughts had, therefore, in all probability, been early led to inquire into the truth of the mission of that Being in whose sufferings all nature had so miraculously sympathized; and we are

not surprised to find that he was the first-fruits of the apostle's preaching in Athens. Dionysius, the Areopagite, was a person of importance, being one of the judges of that court in which St. Paul had spoken; and Damaris also is generally supposed to have been of high rank in the society in which she lived. "Not many mighty, not many noble are called," says the revealed word of God; "for the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen," "that no flesh should glory in His presence." Yet are not the great ones of the world excluded, unless they exclude themselves; and it is probably to convince us of this fact, to encourage the rich, and the mighty, and the noble, that the Spirit of God has recorded the names of most of those persons, who, in high situations of worldly importance, believed in those early times on the Lord Jesus. Thus the Spirit of God has seen right to mention, that "Joseph of Arimathea" was "a rich

man;" that Paul had friends, to whom he desired to be remembered, even in "Cesar's household;" and that Dionysius was "the Areopagite." How often, while there is time, would I urge you whom it has pleased the providence of God to number among the wealthy and the noble of the land, to remember the peculiar snares, and the peculiar difficulties of your particular situation; "the camel," and "the needle's eye," should never be banished from your memory and your hearts; the narrow way and the strait gate, strait and narrow as they are to all, are infinitely straiter and narrower to you than to any around you; all circumstances combine to impede your progress, to entangle your footsteps, to keep you from the cross of your Redeemer, and from the gates of heaven; the fascinations of the world, the snares of its riches, the glitter of its pomps, all spread their thousand snares across your path; you are flattered, and courted, and applauded, not

because you are wiser or better than those around you, but simply because you are more noble or more wealthy. I know none so much to be pitied as yourselves; for with all these additional impediments, no additional allowance will be made for you at the bar of God; you will stand there as the poorest object now before me will stand, and you will be sentenced precisely upon the same conditions, tried by the same laws, subjected to the same ordeal, as the veriest outcast of them all;—pardoned, if clad in the righteousness of your Redeemer;—condemned, if you shall have lived and died in sin, having rejected Him—the "way, the truth, and the life," who is now so freely offered you, and whom none have ever sought in vain.

We are informed of nothing further of St. Paul's ministry at Athens. Some, indeed, declared that they would "hear him again of this matter;" but the Spirit of God is not to be thus trifled with; if

men *will* not hear at those seasons when the voice of the preacher beseeches them, and when God is waiting to be gracious, they *shall* not hear at those future and more "convenient seasons" to which they profess to look, but which God has never promised, and with which He will, in all probability, never furnish them.

From Athens, St. Paul proceeded to Corinth; and having, according to his usual practice, and to our Lord's express command, first offered the Gospel to the Jewish residents there, and without avail, he withdrew himself from the synagogue, and preached in an adjoining house, where his ministry was blessed to the conversion of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and to many of the Gentiles. It was at this time, when St. Paul having retired to rest, probably overwhelmed with the labours of the day, and feeling his utter insufficiency, in his own strength, to meet those of the mor-

row, that the Lord Jesus Christ, Him whom he had once persecuted, but now worshipped and adored, stood before him, and thus addressed His fainting servant: "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city." How merciful an encouragement at such a time, and in such a place: "Be not afraid, but speak." Perhaps you might have thought, that if to any among the sons of men such advice were needless, it was so to St. Paul, the most fearless, the most undaunted of the followers of our Lord. But it is needless to none. The ministers of God, from the apostles themselves down to their most humble and imperfect follower at the present day, are all men of like passions with yourselves, and are continually tempted to suppress the truth, to modify their message, to temporize with those who hear them, lest they should offend and provoke, where they are anxious to conciliate and

instruct. Remember, then, that when your ministers are speaking painful truths, they suffer quite as much from the necessity of doing so, as their hearers; that if they were to follow their own inclinations, they would unquestionably prefer "prophesying smooth things;" but that they are bound by an obligation from which there is no escape, as St. Paul said: "*Necessity* is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." Whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, they must declare the whole counsel of God.

You see, then, that their duty and their authority are the same as the apostles; do you ask what is their encouragement? blessed be God, their encouragement is the same also, "I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee:" with this promise imprinted upon their hearts, they may defy the power of their enemies; there may be much bitterness and much hostility, many may "set

upon them," but they shall not avail to hurt them; neither men nor devils shall injure him who has God for his guide, and the Holy Spirit for his teacher, and the Lord for his companion. But remember also, my brethren, that this promise was not confined to ministers; "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world," is made to every true believer. Realize it, then, in your own hearts, and whatever be your trials, or your labours, or your sorrows, they will be but as the light affliction of a passing moment. If we are able to say of every trial, it is light, even when divided with an earthly friend, how much lighter will the heaviest burden become, when divided with Him who is all power, all strength, all love. Do I say divided with Him? Ah! there is our frailty and our weakness, the imperfection of our faith, the infirmity of our trust; we cannot confide the whole of anything which oppresses us, entirely and

unreservedly to the Lord, we are not content unless we divide the burden with Him; this was never intended; his most gracious direction speaks of no such division; it says, "Cast *all* your care upon Him, for He careth for you;" retain nothing of its wearying anxiety, nothing of its galling burden, but say with the prayer of faith, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me;" help will be laid upon one that is mighty, and you will enjoy infinitely more of the blessed consciousness of that peace and trust which the Lord vouchsafes to his people.

Greatly, then, must St. Paul have felt the encouragement of this delightful promise, while his ministerial efforts must have been not a little strengthened by the declaration of his divine Master, "I have much people in this city." Much people in the heathen city? Yes; many, doubtless, were at that time "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity," who were included in the number of

which the Saviour spake; for of all the cities in the world, Corinth was one of the most profligate and abandoned. Profane writers tell us, that in the temple of Venus alone there were a thousand women living in the open commission of sin, not as a deed of darkness of which the perpetrators were ashamed, but as a portion of the religious rites of their accursed idolatry; yet in "that city," in the polluted Corinth itself, the Lord had "much people." How wonderful is the thought!—"much people," doubtless at that moment sunk in all the grossness and iniquity which surrounded them, who had never yet heard the name of Jesus, and yet for whom the Lord had lived, and agonized, and died; and who were shortly to be effectually called, and perfectly justified, and everlastingly glorified! What encouragement to St. Paul to go forth among them as the minister of reconciliation; what encouragement for every Christian minister as regards the people

among whom he labours! When we behold those who are living in utter disregard of the gospel invitation, those to whom all that is spoken from the word of God, appears at present matter of careless unconcern, our hearts would faint within us were it not for the comfortable persuasion which these words convey. Had the Lord much people in the profligate Corinth, and shall he not have much people in the thousand-fold more profligate London? Surely we may hope, and the very hope itself gladdens our hearts, and cheers our spirits, and rewards our toils—we may hope that in this great city, amidst all the guilt, and sin, and impurity which pervade it—amidst the mass of human beings from which Satan is daily reaping so large and fearful a harvest, the Lord Jesus Christ shall not be left without a gathering. O no! surely we may cherish the hope, that where so many assemble to hear the word of God, there the Lord has "much people," and

that He will gradually, but certainly, draw them forth out of the world of the ungodly, not only to hear, but to receive, the tidings of salvation, and to be united in heart and soul, for time and for eternity, to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

For a year and six months did St. Paul minister at Corinth—a longer season than he ever remained voluntarily at any place, with the exception of Ephesus, during his whole history. And, doubtless, if we may judge from his epistles to the Corinthians, the fruit which he gathered in for his divine Master from that abandoned city, was most abundant and most prolific.

After enduring the usual trials and persecutions there, which were, however, much modified by the good sense and judgment of the Roman deputy Gallio, we find St. Paul, at the commencement of the 19th chapter, returning to Ephesus.

While there, he became acquainted with certain "disciples," and seeing that

they knew but little of the salvation of Jesus Christ, "He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Surely this was a remarkable case; "disciples," and therefore, professed believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who had yet received no "unction from the Holy One," and did not even know whether there were any Holy Ghost. Could such a thing have occurred at that early period, when the miraculous gifts of this good Spirit were so widely prevalent in the Church? Then, my brethren, may not such a thing occur now? Is it impossible that I should at this moment be speaking to "disciples," professed believers, who know but little of the renewing, sanctifying, sealing power of that divine Spirit? May I not, therefore, inquire of you, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" How many are there in a professedly Christian community, who,

if they answered candidly and truly, would be constrained to confess, "We do not," experimentally, "know whether there be any Holy Ghost." Let me, then, urge you to inquire of your own hearts, whether any now present are amongst the number. Have you ever been a partaker of the renewing influences of that divine Spirit, by which alone you are enabled to "put off the old man which is corrupt, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness?" "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ," the word of God has declared that "he is none of His." You may have the name of Christ, but if it be unaccompanied by His Spirit, it will only be as that Church of old, of whom our Lord Himself said, that "they had a name to live, but were dead." You cannot, indeed, say, as these disciples said, that you "have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost," for your truly scriptural

Church, in all her ordinances, most abundantly provides against the possibility of such ignorance; but have you been led, by what you have heard, to seek that Holy Ghost, to rely upon His teaching, to follow His directions, to depend upon His guidance, and, above all, are you bringing forth the *fruits* of the Spirit? Better, far better, never to have heard of His existence or His name, than, after you have heard of it, to grieve that merciful Being, to quench his influences, to resist His strivings, to turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven, and to follow your own counsels and your own imaginations.

"And Paul said unto these disciples, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on Him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord

Jesus. It was, be it remembered, to disciples that St. Paul addressed himself; and might he not with equal reason at the present day, were he once more to go forth as a preacher of righteousness, again make the same inquiry among ourselves? Might he not still say, "Unto what were ye baptized?" Would he behold none living according to the course of this world, entering into all its "pomps and vanities," its follies and its allurements, knowing but little of Him whose name they bear, enjoying but little of private communion with Him, seeking but little of His guidance, and but seldom referring their actions to Him, or making His honour and glory their object and their end? Would it be unjust, then, to ask such persons, "Unto what were ye baptized?" Were ye baptized unto the baptism of the triune Jehovah? or unto what has well been denominated "the trinity of Gentiles,"—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life?"

If they reply, We were baptized to the self-denying creed of a self-denying Saviour, then might it not be fairly asked, With the solemn vows of your baptismal service upon your soul, confirmed by your own free and public ratification of them, registered in the courts of the Almighty, can you say, dare you say, that you are engaged heart and soul in the performance of them? My brethren, I would at this hour venture to ask these very questions of yourselves. I would say—I speak to you as baptized persons—you are under a bond from which you cannot extricate yourselves; you have promised, under the most solemn obligations by which man can bind himself, to dedicate yourselves to God. If you are going on in the indulgence of any hidden lust, or dishonesty, or sin; if you are living to the world; if you are putting God off with a mere lip-service, a mere bodily attendance at His house and ordinances, while your hearts are far from Him, you have

broken, and you are breaking, vows which eternity cannot dissolve; you have deserted a service into which you voluntarily entered; you have apostatized from God! This may be strong language, but there is no medium; either you are Christ's, or you are not; either you are loving and obeying Him now, and daily meetening for His blessed presence, or you are disregarding and rejecting Him, and, in the service of another master, are meetening for another, and O, how different, an eternity!

We judge no man, we "speak as to wise men, judge ye what we say;"—we leave the inquiry to your own consciences and to God; you cannot disregard your baptismal covenant without being fully aware of it; you cannot be aware of it, and neglect it, without incurring the deep and deadly taint of sin upon your soul. Knowing this, we should be your enemies, your worst of enemies, if we did not warn, and caution, and threaten, by the "terrors of the Lord," and beseech you, by the

" mercies of God, to present yourselves a living sacrifice to Him."

We do not, indeed, call upon you, as St. Paul called upon the persons of whom we have spoken, to be re-baptized; your baptism is good, you are already " baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus," all we desire to urge you to, is this—to fulfil your baptismal engagements: the grace which you then received has, perhaps, been lost; pray, therefore, for that new heart and right spirit, without which you cannot see the kingdom of God. The promises then made for you, and since ratified by yourselves, have, in too many cases, been broken and forgotten; pray for the aid of that Holy Ghost of whom we speak, to enable you to " turn to the Lord, for He will have mercy upon you, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But do not deceive yourselves; do not imagine, if you are living to sin, to the world, and not to God, that your baptismal covenant will profit you any thing; the very fact that it is a covenant, is

sufficient to undeceive you; for what becomes of a covenant, when one of the covenanting parties fails of his engagement? Is it not null and void? Could you, among men, hope to derive any advantage from the term of a *broken* covenant? And "shall not the Judge of all the world do right?" Surely you do not doubt it;—then cease to rely upon a covenant, without endeavouring to fulfil it; renew your vows of allegiance with God, through the blood of a crucified Redeemer; enter afresh into His service, devote yourself unreservedly to Him; say, "Father, I have sinned before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son," but now accept me for the sake of Him who came to "seek and to save them that are lost." I am lost, and unless the Saviour seek and find me, I shall irretrievably perish; "draw me, and I will run after Thee;" make me Thine own child by the Spirit of adoption, receive me into Thy blessed family, and keep me from the world, the flesh, and the devil—above